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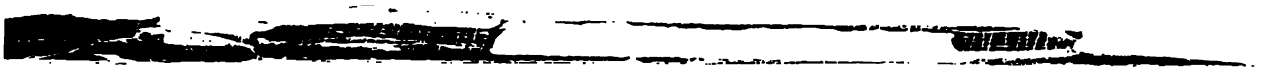
TLE MEADOW

A STORY
OF NORWICH A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

BY

MRS MARSHALL



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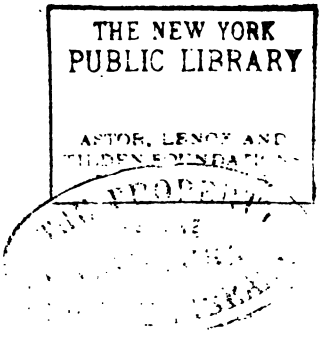

NORWICH IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Drawn by T. Hamilton Crawford from a sketch by T. Rowlandson.

CASTLE MEADOW

A STORY

OF NORWICH *A HUNDRED YEARS AGO*

BY

EMMA MARSHALL

Author of

'The White King's Daughter,' 'Kensington Palace,'

'Under Salisbury Spire,' etc.

NEW YORK

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PREFACE

THE facts of Crome's boyhood are gathered from a memoir of him by Dawson Turner, prefixed to an edition of his etchings published in 1834.

The account of William Crotch is taken from a paper by Dr Burney, communicated to the Royal Society and printed in the *Philosophical Transactions* for 1779.

The imaginary incidents in which the boys take part in this story are introduced as possible and even probable, and have been used to illustrate their distinctive temperaments.

John Crome's early life was marked by the most indomitable perseverance in overcoming the difficulties which beset him in following his beloved art. He often surmounted these by clever and

amusing contrivances, such as taking the hairs of a cat's tail for a paint brush, and using fragments of his old aprons and the ticking of his mother's bed for canvas! His career and that of William Crotch are not followed beyond the days of childhood and boyhood. Their circumstances were widely different. William Crotch had every possible advantage in a home of comparative comfort. He was idolised by his parents, and sent to Cambridge, when only eleven years old, to study music under a competent professor This, doubtless, gave him the refined manner and bearing which John Crome never acquired.

In this, also, the musician was a marked contrast to the painter. The rough, untutored errand-boy in Dr Rigby's surgery had to make a gallant fight against poverty and adversity, but he never faltered in his absolute devotion to art. He had that keen insight and appreciation of all that is beautiful in God's world,

which is the dower of the true artist, and made him one of the greatest of landscape painters.

He became a master who trained many pupils, and made the Norwich School of painters famous. He would take a troop of pupils out with him into the country, and teach them by pointing out to them a lovely landscape, an old tree, a humble cottage under its shadow, and perhaps a stretch of moorland beyond. John Crome only once went abroad to study the works of the great masters, but he often went to London, where Sir William Beechey was his constant patron and friend, and he had free access to the noble collection of pictures at Mr Harvey's house at Catton, where a painting-room or studio was always at his service.

The account of Crome's life to which I have referred gives a very pleasant view of his frank and honourable character. He had a cheerful temper, much droll humour and great powers of conversation, and was a welcome guest in

his later life at the tables of the well born and the wealthy. Indeed, of both musician and painter contemporary records have nothing but words of commendation, for the men themselves as well as for their work.

It is scarcely necessary to say that, with the exception of Dr Rigby, Mr Harvey of Catton, and a glimpse of Amelia Alderson in her winsome childhood, the other characters who take a leading part in this story of Norwich life are all imaginary.

WOODSIDE, LEIGH WOODS,
March 1897.

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BOOK I

THE CHILDHOOD OF GENIUS

'What never had been was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
And what is—shall I say, matched both?—for I was made perfect
too.
All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All through music—and me. . . .

. . . . . .

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that He heard it once; we shall hear it by-and-by.

. . . . . .

God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear.
The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians know.'

ROBERT BROWNING (from *Abt Vogler*).

CASTLE MEADOW

CHAPTER I

THE ORGAN-BUILDER

'THERE is no doubt you are a wonderful clever man, Mr Crotch, but I can scarce believe you have built an organ of your own.'

'Well, madam, all I can say is, do me the honour to call at my house and try it for yourself.'

'I know you are a skilled hand at your work as a carpenter, for Mr Paul has told me so a dozen times. Besides, the corner cupboard you are putting up for me is a sign of your cleverness. But an organ! Has it proper stops and bellows?'

Mr Crotch was putting on his coat and gathering up his tools in a basket, and he said, with a hardly-suppressed laugh,—

'It wouldn't be a decent organ with no bellows. All I ask is that you come and try it for yourself; but'—added the good carpenter, still standing with his paper cap in his hand and the basket of tools slung over his shoulder—'but I've a bigger wonder to show you than my organ, madam. What do you say to a babe of two years old making the keys give out any tune he has heard. My little Will can play "God save King George," and it's rare fun to see him beat the keys with his little fists. But there, madam, I see you are like the rest—you can't believe what I say—so I beg you to hear for yourself.'

'Well, my good man, I will find time to pay you a visit, for I am vastly curious about the organ. As to the child—'

'Ay, as to the child,' the father said, in a somewhat aggrieved tone, 'as to the child, you are slow to believe what I tell you. I wish you a good-day, madam, and thank you kindly

for your custom. I'm always glad to give satisfaction to my master's customers.'

A child, hidden by the curtain over the deep-recessed window of the old-fashioned parlour, where this conversation had taken place, now slipped down from her seat and said,—

'That's all true about baby Crotch. He can play a tune as perfect as you can, Aunt Lettice.'

'What do you know about it, pray, Bell—gossiping with Howson instead of minding your books?'

'Howson didn't tell me. I stopped to listen by Mr Crotch's house as I came from school, and I heard the music; and a woman who was listening held me up to peep in at the window, and I saw the baby playing on the harpsichord; he was sitting on his mother's knee, and she held him—'

'And guided his fingers, no doubt. Don't tell me such a pack of nonsense. I never knew a father yet who did not think his child a prodigy. However, I'll go and try the organ some day; a pretty organ it is, I'll be bound.'

'And take me, aunt, do—do take me along with you.'

'I'll see about it. Now, be off to your tasks. I've got to practise my sol-fa and the sonata. I'm to play at Dr Rigby's party on Saturday.'

As Bell crossed the parlour in the dim light she made a spot of brightness in the gathering shadows of the February evening.

Her frock, it is true, was of black bombazine, a material much used in Norwich, which held, at that time, a monopoly of the crêpe and bombazine manufacture.

Bell was an orphan, and still wore black for her father, with whom she had never lived; but a large pinafore, tied with tape behind and guiltless of any ornament, showed purely white by contrast with its surroundings, and her head, covered with short curls of a reddish-gold, also caught the waning light which came in through the window, and glistened as they were tossed back from her forehead by Bell's white, slender fingers.

Her aunt had already seated herself at the old harpsichord, and had begun a series of scales,

culminating in notes much too high for her voice, which made the child put her hands to her ears and run out of the room.

'Why does she sing? She can play beautiful music, but those notes are like to go through one's head. Howson, dear Howson,' Bell said, as she went into the kitchen, 'I am come to learn my lessons here.'

What a charming kitchen it was, with its brick floor showing ruby red in the pleasant blaze of a cheerful fire in an old-fashioned open grate, where the jack was suspended, and the large kettle on the hob was singing its subdued song.

At a table on which stood a high candlestick and a snuffer-tray a woman sat knitting, the needles shining in the firelight and making a pleasant click-click as an accompaniment to the kettle.

'I'll light the candle, my dear; you can bring your books to the table. I don't wonder you can't learn your tasks while that "shawming" goes on. Lor, it's like the cats on the wall at nights.'

'Don't light the candle yet, Howson. Let's

have a chat,' and Bell dragged a wooden stool to her old friend's side, and leaned her head against her knee.

Howson was in her afternoon gown of dark lilac print. She called it 'laylock,' and over it she wore a black-stuff apron with pockets. The gown was scanty in its folds and short all round. The most important part of her dress was her large white cap, tied close under her chin, the strings lying upon the thick linen 'handkercher,' which was folded over the half-low bodice.

What hair Howson had was seen peeping beneath it in two flat curls streaked with silver, fastened on her forehead by side combs. It was a homely face which looked out from the frills of her cap, but it was full of kindliness, and even tenderness, as Howson said,—

'Have you got on at school to-day, my dearie?'

'Yes. I like my books, but not the girls; they are rude sometimes and— But never mind, tell me about the baby Crotch.'

'Dear life! I've heard enough of him to-day from his father. He is a wonder, I daresay, but they make too much fuss over him. I

don't hold with folks praising up their own children.'

'But you know, Howson, he is a marvel. I peeped in at the window to-day and saw him and heard him play "God save the King." Oh! I hope Aunt Lalham will take me along with her when she goes to play on Master Crotch's organ.'

And now a tap was heard at the kitchen door and without waiting for permission, a head was thrust in, and Mrs Howson, starting up, exclaimed, 'Lor, Johnnie, is that you?'

'Of course it is. I've brought the physic to strengthen the missus's throat,' and a boy advanced into the kitchen with a basket in his hand, which he set down with a thud on the brick floor.

A great jingle of bottles followed and, lifting the lid of the basket, the boy said,—

'All right, here's the right physic, to be took six times a day and four times in the night, and the missus is to gargle with the stuff in t'other bottle, and take care not to swaller it—it's just deadly pison, you know.'

'Stop talking that stuff and nonsense; I wonder the doctor puts up with you, that I do.'

'He don't put up with me; he gave me a thrashing to-day, 'cos I took his likeness on a bit of pasteboard, and I made the cat squeal —pulling hairs out of her tail.'

'What a wicked, cruel boy!'

It was the first time Bell had spoken, and suddenly the boy's manner changed. He became aware of the beauty of the picture before him. The ruddy light on the little shapely head, the clear, transparent skin of the young face, in which the blaze of the firelight shimmered, Howson's white cap, the background of the dark walls, the rafters of the ceiling from which two hams hung, and a string of onions, the balls of creamy white showing through the brown outer skin.

The eyes that took all this in were the eyes of an artist, though no one knew it, not even John Crome himself; all he knew was that he loved to look on what was so pretty—the rich colour, the flicker of the firelight, the little golden head nestling still against Howson's knee.

'I ain't wicked or cruel,' he said. 'Don't 'ee call me that. I have my uses for cats' hairs.'

'I don't believe it,' Bell said. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean I make brushes of 'em.'

'Brushes! What for?'

'To paint your portrait with, maybe, see if I don't. There! that's the truth, and now good evening to you. Valentine's Eve isn't far off; maybe yer'll have a valentine.'

Then taking up the basket he whistled merrily as his heavy footfall was heard on the pavement of Magdalen Street.

John Crome was errand boy to Dr Rigby, and being exceptionally sharp for his age was employed by the doctor to clean out the surgery, wash the bottles, count pills into the boxes, paste on the labels and carry out the medicines to the patients.

He slept in a little closet off the surgery, impregnated with the smell of drugs, and only on rare occasions did he get leave to run home, except on Sundays, when he had the afternoon to himself.

Full of pranks, and delighting in mischief, he was often scolded and cuffed by the

doctor himself, and had a bad time of it when he put the assistant out of temper. The subordinate was far harder to please than his superior, and although, as we should say in these days, 'unqualified,' he was deputed to see the less important patients and to make up medicines by the prescriptions which Dr Rigby had written.

In spite of all his misdemeanours, the clever physician, who was at this time only beginning his distinguished career, had a liking for John Crome, and he saw in him something which raised him above the ordinary drudge-boy of the surgery.

The child of a poor weaver, who plied his shuttle unceasingly in a garret in Castle Ditches, John Crome had been early turned out to earn his bread. He had stood with other boys and girls wanting places on the site of the old Ducal Palace, and there Dr Rigby had first seen him. Fortunately for him, his mother took him to the doctor's house at the hour he saw poor patients, to have some medicine for a childish ailment, and Dr Rigby

remembered seeing him '*on the Palace*' as the Norwich boys called it.

The evident poverty of the mother, and the pitiful tale she told of the struggle her sickly husband had to keep up with the hand-loom weaving of younger and stronger men, the decent appearance of the boy, whose suit was patched and the frill he wore round his neck darned in many places, made the doctor ask what work the boy wanted or was fit for.

'He is but a child, sir, but he is sharp enough —a little too sharp at times. I should be glad to get him out—and—'

'Very well, bring him here in another week, and I'll take him on to clean out the surgery and assist Mr Hicks. If he is a good boy, I will keep him till he is old enough to better himself.' And thus it was that Johnnie Crome was engaged by Dr Rigby.

'And you'll leave off scrawling and messing with colours when you are the doctor's servant,' his mother said. 'Mind you do. I declare the walls of the kitchen are not fit to be seen

with all the rubbish you draw on 'em with bits of chalk.'

Johnnie said nothing, but he thought the more.

Give up drawing! No, he had never given it up, and as he ran along on this February evening, he was revolving in his own mind the possibility of getting a sheet of valentine paper, with a lace edge, on which to paint the little figure he had seen in the ruddy light of Mrs Lulham's kitchen.

He had yet several errands to get through. To his delight, there was a bottle of medicine for the Royal Hotel in the Market Place, and a box of pills for Mrs Turner at the shoemaker's shop in Davey Place.

Norwich was but poorly lighted at the end of the last century. A few dull oil-lamps stood at a respectful distance from each other, along what was known—and is still known—as the Gentlemen's Walk. The lamplighter was running about with his ladder and tinder-box, often finding it a slow process to make the wick, floating in oil, spring into a flame.

The shutters had not been put up in many

of the shops. Two or three were lighted up, and at one of those John Crome stopped, and pressing his face as close as possible to the window, he peered in and saw there were a great many people buying valentines.

The paper ones were all laid out in a tray in the window, but beyond there was a great variety of small articles displayed to suit the taste of the purchasers—a different display, indeed, to that which is familiar at Christmas in these days — leather housewives, silver thimbles in little ivory cases, a sheaf of quill pens tied with blue ribbon, a writing-case and a paint-box. But Norwich always made preparations to keep the feast of Saint Valentine, and substantial presents were sent by the rich to their friends, the great charm being that they were anonymous and were generally accompanied with verses in a feigned hand, or one of the ready-made couplets which were printed under the little Cupids, with their bows and arrows, and hearts pierced with a dart, which were favourite devices.

The valentine papers of a later time were

often very pretty, and even artistic in design, but those upon which John Crome gazed did not satisfy him. The Cupids were misshapen, and the bows bigger than their whole bodies.

A heart with a wreath of flowers pleased him better, and he tried to read the lines beneath, but they were printed indistinctly and baffled him.

Some pink sheets of plain paper with a Vandyke edge were the object of his ambition. If only he could buy one of them, but he had to give his wages to his mother, and he only had a shilling a week. Sometimes he got an extra penny for running at full speed with some medicine urgently wanted, but that did not happen often, and at this moment his pockets were quite empty.

He was about to pursue his way to Davey Place, filled with unsatisfied longings for the pink paper, when a young lady, in a long green cloth pelisse and a grey beaver bonnet, came out with several parcels in her hand. As she passed John Crome, she brushed against the basket, which was slung over his arm, and

looking down at him, said with a smile, as the bottles rattled, 'I hope I have not broken anything in your basket?'

Then she passed on, and John Crome saw on the doorstep a crimson silk purse, with steel rings and tassels, glittering in the light from the interior of the shop.

In a moment John possessed himself of it and darted off to overtake the lady, who he felt sure had dropped it.

She had gone into another shop, this time a jeweller's, and John, looking through the window, saw her standing by the counter, while the shopman was showing her a cushion on which were stuck a number of scarf-pins used to hold the folds of linen or silk which it was the fashion for gentlemen to wind round their necks and fasten with a pin or a brooch.

John held the purse in his hand as he stood with his face pressed against the window pane. Through the network several golden guineas were showing at one end, and silver crowns and shillings at the other. Not for one moment did John Crome think of keeping the treasure

he had found, but he was speculating as to the amount of fine things all that money would buy. If it were his, he would buy a picture he had seen in a print-shop of a beautiful lady with powdered hair and a little dog by her side.

He had scarcely been able to make out the words beneath it, which signified that it was an engraving from one of Sir Joshua Reynolds' pictures. He knew nothing about the great painter then. He simply looked at the lady as he had looked at Bell in Mrs Lulham's kitchen. Both were beautiful, and both quite beyond his power to imitate.

Presently, as he expected, he saw the young lady start and suddenly put her hand in her pocket, and look on the floor of the shop, move the parcels she had laid on the counter, and then turn to the door.

Johnnie met her and said, 'Pray, have you lost anything, miss?'

'Yes, yes. I must have dropped my purse when I came out of Mingay's shop. I remember now you were standing there.'

Johnnie's eyes twinkled roguishly as he

brought his hand from his back and held up the purse.

'Oh! Thank you! I was in such a fright. Here! I must give you a shilling,' the young lady said. 'You are a very good, honest boy.' Then she rather spoiled the praise by saying, 'I must count the money first,' and going to the counter she looked into the purse, saying, 'The money is all right,' as she did so. 'Yes, three guineas in gold and eleven shillings in silver —two crown pieces and a shilling. Here, boy, the shilling is yours.'

A shilling! It was a fortune to John Crome. How often he had wished to possess one, instead of handing one—his weekly wage—to his mother.

'Thank you, miss,' he said, and, putting the treasure into his mouth for safety, he seized his basket and was gone.

The pin had been chosen and put into a little paper box. The price was just one guinea, and, having paid for it, the young lady gathered up the rest of her parcels, put the purse safely in the pocket under her pelisse, and with blushes and smiles left the shop.

'She is someone's Valentine,' the shopman said, 'and that pin is for him.'

'No doubt; and he bought that brooch for her this forenoon.'

'Who is it?'

'That s not your business,' was the short reply of the elder man; 'Valentines ain't public property. I should have thought you knew that!'

'There's always a shrewd guess about 'em. A guinea is not spent on a cravat-pin for nothing!'

'Well, well, it's no business of yours or mine. What can I show you, sir?' This was addressed to the next comer, a young man, who by his appearance did not seem likely to buy any of the expensive trinkets, and did not receive the same assiduous attention from the elder man, but was left to the younger one who had ventured to speculate as to the destination of the jewelled cravat-pin.

CHAPTER II

AN ELDERLY SUITOR

THE young lady having completed her purchases and recovered her purse, went at a rapid pace along Davey Place, and, skipping up the steps with a light, airy tread, turned to the left along the road under the Castle Hill, and stopped at a modest red-brick house in what is still called Castle Meadow.

'What do ye mean by being so late, Hyacinth? It's near tea-time, and they are waiting to bring in the urn.'

The voice was querulous, and came from the depth of an easy chair with high shoulders, which were effectual in keeping out drafts, if drafts there could be in that close room, the atmosphere of which was almost suffocating after the fresh, crisp air of the February evening.

'What have you been up to, eh? Wasting

money, I'll warrant. I suppose you know, when the Lord Almighty takes me, you'll not have a sixpence. You'd better make haste and get a husband and leave me.'

'I am in no haste to change a dear old father for a husband,' Hyacinth said, bending down over the chair and kissing what could be kissed of the forehead under the night-cap, surmounted by a tassel, very like the headgear with which we are familiar in the portraits of the poet Cowper.

'Tut! tut! flattery don't go down with me; go and get your things off, and tell Sumpter to get the muffins toasted, and'—in a heightened voice —'not to waste the butter. One would think I was rolling in riches.'

Hyacinth laughed merrily. It was well for her she could laugh and be merry, for to some natures her life with an irascible old man, who was for ever harping on his poverty, would have been the excuse for habitual depression and lamentations.

To be sure, Hyacinth Woodrow knew that her father had a pretty sum laid up in a tin box, to which he added by stealth whenever he thought

he was unobserved, and if he felt secure he would, at rare intervals, count out his golden guineas and finger them with a tender touch, as if to show how precious they were.

His allowance to Hyacinth was unwillingly doled out once a quarter, and the gold and silver in the pretty crimson purse did not come from him.

Hyacinth had a fairy godmother who lived between Cromer and Sheringham, on her own estate, and she took care to send her godchild a substantial gift every Christmas, with the injunction,—

'Don't let your father know of this; it is between you and me. It is no business of his. If he thinks you can dress as a gentlewoman on ten pounds a year, leave him to the delusion. I know better.'

A bank-note for ten pounds had been the gift this last Christmas, and there would be another present on St Valentine's Eve, Hyacinth felt sure.

Yet her dismay was great when she took her purse out of her pocket, and was about to put away

the gold till it was wanted in a little japanned tin box, to find only *one* guinea instead of two, for the shilling that she thought she had given the boy for picking up her purse had by some mistake been put with the gold coins and a guinea with the silver.

'How could I be such an idiot!' she exclaimed. 'That boy will never bring it back, and besides, he does not know me. It is gone—the guinea is gone, and I shall never see it again. The child does not know where I live, and if he did, would he be honest enough to lose the guinea? Ah, well-a-day, there are worse troubles than that, and anyhow, I've bought my valentine. It's a vastly pretty pin,' she continued, as she took it out of the little box, where it lay in a bed of cotton wool.

'But he must never, never know who sent it. Will he guess? I must practise handwriting to-morrow, or better still, I'll print the letters. I am a fool, I know it,' Hyacinth said, as she kissed the head of the pin and replaced it in its hiding-place.

Then she pushed the other small parcels

into a drawer of the old mahogany chest, on which her small looking-glass stood, and throwing aside her pelisse and the high beaver bonnet with its huge bow between the crown and the brim, she had just time to arrange the curls on the top of her head, which the bonnet had crushed, when a sharp tap at the door made her start as if she was guilty and answer 'Coming.'

'Aye, you may say "coming," and you'd better hurry, for there's a fine gentleman in the parlour, and I'll be bound he wants to be your Valentine.'

'Do not be silly, Bridget, it puts me in a rage to hear you. What do I care for fifty fine gentlemen? As for this one, if you mean Mr Royston, I detest him. He is as old as my father, and—'

'As rich as a Jew, and he is very pretty behaved.'

'That's news! I hate these formal manners, they don't take me in. Mr Royston can swear, and drink, when it suits him, I warrant.'

'Well, there's Sumpter ringing the tea-bell

like fury. Do 'ee go or you'll have all "the fat in the fire," as my poor mother used to say. I wish you had put on your red gown with the ruffle and sash.'

Hyacinth did not vouchsafe another word; she swept past her old servant, the wife of the man called Sumpter, who acted as valet, footman and general scapegoat to Mr Woodrow.

Sumpter might have been made of wood as he stood by the parlour door to open it for Hyacinth.

He saw a great deal with those stony, expressionless eyes, and nothing was lost on him, though his master looked on him as a blockhead, who was next door to a fool, and treated him as such.

When Hyacinth entered the parlour, the urn, a large bronze one, was hissing and bubbling on the table, and a plentiful supply of hot cakes and sweet buns were spread on a green baize cloth. A man, whose age it was difficult to determine, advanced with a low bow which Hyacinth acknowledged with a stiff curtsey, and going to the table took

her place before the urn, and, unlocking a small tortoise-shell tea-caddy, measured four spoonsful into the old silver pot. Then she put hot water into the cups, filled the teapot, and professed to be utterly unconscious of the admiring gaze with which Mr Royston followed every movement.

'The tea will taste like nectar, madam, brewed by your fair hand. It is vastly good of you, sir,' turning to Mr Woodrow, who had a little table by his chair, 'to permit me to come to this feast of the gods.'

'You are an honoured guest, sir,' was the reply from the chair by the fire, then, 'Sumpter, you fool, hand the muffins, and my tea. Look out! look out! only one spoonful of sugar. Dear, dear, how wasteful you are!'

'Shall I give you sugar in your tea, sir?' were the first words Hyacinth had deigned to address to her admirer.

'Sweets from the sweet,' he said. 'Real Demerara, I take it—much obliged. One spoonful—one, thank you kindly.'

Mr Woodrow had the lion's share of the

muffins, and was plied by Sumpter with thin crisp toast and cup after cup of tea.

Tea in those days had a certain fragrance unknown now, and was more deserving of the poet's description as the cup that cheers but does not inebriate. Tea was an expensive luxury at the end of the eighteenth century as it is a cheap one at the end of the nineteenth.

Mr Royston kept up a babble of small talk and gossip, interspersed with compliments which we should now consider fulsome and ill-bred. But broad flattery was not only tolerated by women of those days but looked upon as their due from men.

Hyacinth certainly gave her elderly admirer scant encouragement, and maintained a distant, not to say haughty, demeanour which would have discouraged most men, but not the old beau with his frilled shirt and ample neck-tie, where a diamond pin shone and shimmered and would have put to shame the modest one lying safe hidden from all eyes in the box upstairs.

Mr Royston had all the assurance of a man who knows that his dress and manners are, judged by the fashion of his time, faultless. Diamond studs glittered amongst the frills of his shirt, a yellow waistcoat, short at the waist, was very much in evidence, as the blue coat was much cut away from it, and allowed ample room to display a massive gold watch chain, to which a bunch of seals hung suspended—the watch, in what was then called the 'fob,' giving evidence of its presence in the pauses of the conversation by a sonorous tick.

Mr Royston's nankin breeches were very tight, and fastened at the knee with silver buckles. Silk stockings met them, and were stretched over a suspiciously good calf, which might or might not be altogether due to natural proportions. The shoes, with their dainty bows, were in keeping with the rest of the attire at one extremity, while a bob-wig, powdered and tied with ribbon, completed his toilette.

The face beneath the wig was small and thin, and the pair of keen, rather fox-like, eyes, which

were continually directed towards the fair lady who presided at the tea-table, were bright and undimmed with age.

Age! What was his age? I dare not undertake to risk a guess, and no one had any certainty on this point.

'An old frump of sixty or seventy talking such nonsense is sickening.'

Such was Hyacinth's unspoken opinion as she replied to Mr Royston in monosyllables, and toyed with her teaspoon, impatient for the conclusion of the meal, and hoping that Sumpter would soon be called upon to announce Mr Royston's 'chair' was waiting.

But she was not to be so fortunate.

'Mr Royston,' her father said, 'you'll excuse me from going into the withdrawing-room. I am suffering from a more than usual severe rheum, and I am thus imprisoned in the dining parlour. But my daughter will be happy to play a tune on the harpsichord, I am sure. Go, Hyacinth, and let Mr Royston hear what you can do. I ordered the fire to be lit. Is it burning up Sumpter?'

Sumpter replied in his sepulchral voice,—

'The chimley do smoke dreadful, sir.'

'Smoke—smoke—nonsense! it is all your carelessness, you rascal! Did I not tell you to have a fire kindled in good time? However, Mr Royston will excuse it, I know.'

Hyacinth's breast swelled with indignation.

So this visit of Mr Royston's was a concocted plan of her father's, and for this he had been guilty of the extravagance of a fire in the room above the parlour, called by courtesy the withdrawing-room, to which no one, except on rare occasions, ever withdrew.

Mr Royston, with his hand on his heart, and his crush hat under his arm, said,—

'It will be only too charming to hear you perform, madam. I was looking forward to that pleasure at Dr Rigby's *soirée* on a near day. Now I shall have a foretaste of the delight.'

'Indeed, sir, I am a poor performer, and I only play to amuse myself. I beg you to excuse me.'

'Go, as I bid you, at once, you baggage!' Mr Woodrow said in an aside. 'Go, without further delay.'

'If you deem it a pleasure for a guest to be choked with smoke, I obey, sir,' Hyacinth said, making a curtsey to her father on leaving the room, and, ignoring Mr Royston's offered hand, she left the parlour and tripped upstairs.

Mr Royston tried hard to follow her at the same pace, but stumbled, and ignominiously fell prone on the top stair.

Hyacinth heard the fall, but was too well-bred to exult over the discomfiture of the poor gentleman, though she had much ado to prevent laughing, as he breathlessly vowed he was not hurt—not in the least hurt—and if he had been hurt, what would it matter, so long as he could have this longed-for, this coveted interview.

The unused drawing-room was cold and cheerless. The fire had burned up, but there was a strong smell of wood smoke clinging to everything.

The walls were painted a cold grey, and chairs were set at intervals round a circular table, where a few books lay.

Over the mantelshelf was the one ornament of the room—the portrait of Hyacinth's young mother.

So fair and childlike she looked. Was it possible she had been the wife of the irascible old man downstairs?

'A lovely picture,' Mr Royston said, as the light of two candles on the mantelshelf brought it out as a contrast to the surrounding cold cheerlessness of the grey walls. The cherry-coloured scarf which floated over the rounded shoulders; the tiny, dainty straw hat with its little red bow set askance on the wealth of chestnut hair; the eyes which smiled on the daughter who stood by the old beau; the taper fingers holding a little white dog by a blue ribbon, which had none of the life that characterised the figure of Hyacinth's mother, but was stiff and wooden.

'Your image, madam,' Mr Royston said. 'Upon my life, it is hard to say which is the lovelier —the mother or the daughter.'

'I am not considered like my mother, sir,
There is naught of resemblance but my name,
which is the same as hers.'

Then, thinking there was safety in music, Hyacinth seated herself at the harpsichord and

began to rattle off a minuet on the loose, yellow keys.

But it was of no avail. The fatal moment had come. At the first pause in the music, as Hyacinth was trying in vain to remember something else, and failing, rose to get a music book from a shelf, Mr Royston seized the opportunity. He bent one knee, stiff though it was and sore with his recent fall, and exclaimed,—

'May I pray you, madam, to give me a few moments' attention. I have your worthy father's permission to address you, and to declare my devotion, my adoration, and lay myself and all I possess at your feet.'

Hyacinth drew herself to her full height, and said,—

'Indeed, sir, you do me much honour, but I must at once decline your proposal.'

'Nay! be not so cruel! I would not appear boastful, but I have a pretty little place at Lakenham, and I would instal you as its queen and mistress, and you shall find me your obedient servant and slave for ever.'

Hyacinth laughed now, and as the light flickered on the face over the mantelshelf, it seemed to share her mirth.

'Oh, sir, you are putting the case upside down! If I remember right, it would be I who should obey and serve.'

'Nay! fairest of your sex! nay! you do me a wrong—a great wrong, but I will not press my suit. I know the shrinking and unwillingness of sweet maidens to yield consent at once. I appreciate it. It makes me more than ever your most devoted suitor. I shall hope for a different answer next time—yes, next time.'

'I beg you, sir, to believe my answer will be the same if the question be put again.'

'Ah! I will not believe it! Nay! nay!' and Mr Royston seized her hand which rested on the back of the music stool, and, possessing himself of it, covered it with kisses.

Hyacinth snatched it away.

'Nay, sir; this is too much. I will not suffer such impertinence.'

'Charming when angry — more charming than ever! Such fire in those lovely eyes—

such splendid hauteur. Why, by Heaven! I never admired you as much as at this moment.'

Hyacinth stepped past him as he rose from his knee, an uncomfortable, and becoming a perilous position, and pulling the bell-rope with a twice-repeated fervour, Sumpter's stolid face appeared at the door.

'Inquire if Mr Royston's chair is round, and if not, bring him word when it is there!'

Then, with a sweeping curtsey Hyacinth said,—

'I wish you good-evening, sir, and better manners,' and the next moment Mr Royston was alone.

'The vixen!' he exclaimed—'the young shrew! Ah! but I'll have her yet. I'll have my revenge. By gad! she is beautiful when she flares out like that. But I'll have her yet.'

And the face from above the mantelshelf seemed to smile incredulously, and the laughing eyes followed Mr Royston as he shuffled from the room, disconcerted and humiliated, however much he might try to carry it off.

Hyacinth locked herself in her own room, and determined to wait there till her unfortunate suitor had departed.

She was half-amused and half-angry, wondering what made her father support the claims of such an elderly lover, and feeling that she had been entrapped into being alone with him.

'How can a father wish to sacrifice his child —his only child—in this manner?'

Then a sudden light seemed to dawn on her.

'He professes to be poor, and this man is rich —lends him money—has lent him money—and I am to be the loan paid back with interest. And there is yet another reason. My father has found out that another cares for me, and perhaps that I care for him. So he thinks to dazzle me with the riches of this old man, his fine house, his chariot and pair, his kinship to Lord Walpole. If he is of kin to him it is in no creditable fashion. Oh! it is a disgraceful business from first to last. Marry that dressed-up old fool! No, I would sooner die. My sweet mother died young. From what Bridget lets fall she had enough to bear. She went into a

decline, and I had better do the like—maybe! How cold it is! and how dark! When is he taking his departure? Yet I must stay here till he is gone. I shall write to my godmother and ask her to protect me—protect me from my own father. It is too miserable, and then —then there is Philip—Philip—'

The sound of the name as it fell from her lips seemed to give her courage.

'I know, yes, I know he loves me, but he will not risk being rejected and treated ill by my father. He may be poor, and only a clerk in a bank, but he comes of a good old race, and is of gentler blood than mine. Then what a love he has for music; to see him in the Cathedral, to watch his face as the organ rolls forth its melody. Ah! what a fool I am to meander on like this. Hark! there are the chairmen arrived. I hear their knock at the door, and the coast will be clear soon. Yes, the door is opened, and the chair is in the lobby. I must creep out and watch.'

Hyacinth very gently drew the bolt of her chamber door and crept out to the head of the

stairs, looking over the banisters into the narrow lobby, lighted by the dim oil lamp hanging there. She had the satisfaction of seeing her admirer come out of the parlour door and step into the chair. Then the lid was shut down, the men raised the poles of the sedan, and Mr Royston was borne off at a swinging pace to the house of one of his chosen friends, where he would play cards cautiously, but for high points, supporting himself with frequent potations, till the small hours struck out from the belfry of Saint Peter's, Mancroft, and was answered by those of the thirty-six churches for which Norwich was then famous.

'The supper-tray is gone in, Miss Hyacinth. Ain't you going down to the parlour?'

'Ah! my good Bridget, I shall hear enough scolding to take away any desire for supper.' Hyacinth was half downstairs by this time. 'I have been watching the chair off, and, I say "good riddance of bad rubbish, Bridget."'

Bridget shook her head.

'Don't 'ee be too contrary, my dearie. I know the master, p'r'aps, better than anyone.

"Look here, bor'," says I to Sumpter, "the master will get his way, see if he don't, and if 'tis true money is wanting, though I say it's the old story of 'much would have more.'"'

'Get his way—marry me to that old, broken-down man—no; not if his ridiculous body were stuffed with gold. There, Bridget, that's the last of it!' and then with a smile and a nod at Sumpter, Hyacinth went to her father with a defiant air.

'Well, so you've played the *rôle* of the coy miss,' he said. 'It seems to have suited you very well, for this gentleman is more in love with you than ever.'

'I am sorry to hear it, father. I am more in hate with him than ever.'

'You idiot! as if that made any difference. Men like a spice of wickedness, and Royston is not the man to care for a woman who flings herself at his head. Now, no more nonsense; mix me my rum and milk—you do it better than Sumpter—and do me a leetle morsel of toast as thin as a wafer.'

Hyacinth went to the tray which Sumpter had set on the table before he left the parlour.

She did her father's bidding, heated the milk in a little saucepan on the fire, stirred in the rum, cut thin slices from the loaf, and kneeling down before the grate toasted them to a turn.

Then, having placed her father's supper on the small table at his side, she retired to the larger one and ate her homely meal of bread and cheese with a draught of ale, with the relish of youth.

Her father watched her with a curious, searching glance from time to time.

'You'll be drinking the best sherry wine and Madeira before another year is out,' he said at last, 'and there's a likelihood of your becoming my lady. There is only a shaky life betwixt our good friend and a baronetcy. Do ye know that, eh?'

'I know that I'd sooner eat the rind of cheese and drink sour beer to the end of my days than be "my lady" Royston, if that's what you mean, sir; and as to a shaky life, I take it, whose ever it may be, it is not so shaky as is this friend of yours. He is as old as you are, I believe—ay, older.'

'Don't prate rubbish like that. I am ill and poor and feeble. Mr Royston is in the world, mixes with the highest quality, is sought after and—'

'Sought after!' Hyacinth exclaimed, interrupting her father. 'Sought after! A sorry quest truly, and not like to reward the finder when found.'

'Look you, Hyacinth, you are not looking after this wretched bank clerk, his half nephew, I hope,' her father said. 'Whether or not, you shall marry Mr Royston, and that before the year is much older. You are a great trial to me, that you are—a poor, sick, old man, who isn't long for this world, and wants to leave you well provided for.'

This was said in an aggrieved, whining voice, finishing with something like a sob.

But Hyacinth did not take any heed of it. She pulled the bell for Sumpter to remove the supper-tray and said,—

'Shall I read to you, father?'

'Not to-night—not to-night; I am too much upset and shaken by your conduct. I'll have Rigby's last sleeping draught and go to bed.'

CHAPTER III

MUSICIAN AND PAINTER

MRS CROTCH had been out making a few purchases for Saint Valentine's Eve when she was met by her husband at the door, who said,—

'Come in—come in—I've got something to show you.'

'What are you in such a fuss about?' Mrs Crotch said. 'I must put my valentines in the cupboard. I declare I think music has turned your brain, husband.'

'It's turned now—I believe you,' the poor man said, 'and so will yours be, if I don't mistake. Lor, Nancy, put the trumpery valentines away and come along upstairs.'

'I don't know what you are in such a fluster about,' Mrs Crotch said. 'Who have you got at the organ?'

'The child, the child—the babe of two years old. Hark!' and as father and mother opened the door they found little Will seated on the high stool before the organ, his brother, a boy of fourteen, blowing the bellows, and the tiny hands striking the notes of 'God save King George,' both of the first and second part, with tenor and bass, all correctly except the low note before the close, which was an octave below and out of the reach of the little hand.

The child went on playing without even noticing his parents' presence, and on his mother seizing him in her arms and covering him with kisses, telling him he was a wonder and that she was so proud of him she was like to burst with joy, little Will screamed and struggled and would not be pacified till his mother had taken the seat on the stool and held him on her knee that he might go on with his performance.

'I see how it is,' she exclaimed; 'he heard Mistress Lulham play "God save the King." He caught all the harmony as well as the air. Oh, husband, whatever shall be done with the child? I'd like the neighbours to hear him. There was

Mrs Taylor, scoffing yesterday when I told her he could play the air; she told me I made myself a laughing-stock and had best hold my tongue. Then that high and mighty Mrs Lulham, she will be astounded, or she ought to be.'

So the mother talked on, the child taking no heed, and the father leaning against the wall, as much amazed as his wife, but saying nothing.

That afternoon Mrs Crotch could not resist the pleasure of going to Mrs Lulham to tell her what had been the result of her playing on her husband's organ.

Mrs Lulham was out rehearsing for the musical party at Dr Rigby's, which was to take place the next day.

But Howson was in her pleasant kitchen with Bell, and listened, with sundry exclamations, to Mrs Crotch's story.

'You don't say so. Well, if you would take my advice, Mrs Crotch, you'll keep the child from the organ. I don't believe he'll live to be a man; he's got blue veins showing on his "forred," and so had my sister-in-law's little boy, and he died before he was ten year old.'

'That's quite another matter, Mrs Howson; my child is what they call a genius, and yet he is strong and hearty at his meals. You are a Job's comforter, that's what you are, like all the rest of 'em. I did think you would have been more friendly like, but, lor, it's the way of the world.'

During this conversation Bell had been listening with rapt attention. She now ventured to say,—

'I should dearly like to hear the baby play—if I might.'

'Very well, my dear, you shall. Come along with me now.'

'Oh! Howson, dear Howson,' Bell said, jumping for joy, 'may I go—may I go along with Mrs Crotch?'

'You've not done the seam in the night-gown yet,' Howson said; 'but if someone will bring you back before missis comes home, I'll let you go.'

Bell did not want another word. She skipped up the stairs which opened into the kitchen, and put on her little gray duffle cloak and big

black beaver bonnet, tied with black sarsenet ribbon under her chin.

'Is aught heard of her mother?'

'No,' said Howson, shortly; 'not that I knows of.'

'She ain't dead, is she?'

'Can't say.'

'She runned off with a fine gentleman, didn't she?'

'Lor, Mrs Crotch, you are made up of questions. Hush, now, the child is coming downstairs.'

Bell flung her arms round Howson's neck, and bade her good-bye.

'Bless her little heart!' the faithful Howson said.

'She has got her poor mother's fair face. God grant it don't lead her into trouble!'

Bell had seen Will Crotch, as we know, through the window, and now, with that foreshadowing of maternal love which makes little girls of Bell's gentle, loving nature delight in dolls and in babies, when they can nurse and fondle them, reprove and kiss them by turns, she was all

anxiety to have the wonderful little boy in her arms, and nurse and fondle him.

But Bell was much disappointed when little Will scowled at her and refused to get off the floor, where he was busy with a long pencil his father used for marking his measurements, and making figures of squares and circles on the boards, which were only partially covered with strips of coarse woven carpet.

'Here's a little girl come to see my precious, and hear him play his pretty tunes.'

To this Will only answered some unintelligible words, beating his heels on the floor, and showing no intention of giving up his position there.

'He's a bit shy; he'll come round. Come, Will, get up and speak to little Bell.'

Bell sat down on the floor by him, and tried to make out what the figures he was drawing meant.

By degrees she drew nearer, and putting her sweet face close to Will's, said, in a whisper,—

'I'd love to hear baby play "God save the King." I can sing it, but I can't play it.'

She had touched the right chord by this.

Little Will's frown was exchanged for a smile; he got upon his feet, and pointing to the harpsichord, toddled to the wooden bench before it, climbed up and began to play.

Then Bell raised her little bird-like voice and sang the words in tune, clear and bell-like.

The baby musician's heart was won. He turned quickly and held out his arms, and Bell clasped him in hers, and their friendship was sealed.

At Dr Rigby's surgery, in Saint Giles', there were important consultations going on between John Crome and the assistant, Mr Hicks.

Sheets of paper lay on the table, pill-boxes and phials were put on one side, and Mr Hicks, with his reddish hair pushed back from his forehead, was in the agonies of composing verses to his valentine.

John Crome had possessed himself of an old paint-box which had once been used by Mrs Rigby, and, discarded, had found its way into the lower regions of the house.

Hairs from the cat's tail had been used, as we

know, to make a brush, and with these unpromising materials John Crome was trying to draw on the sheet of pink paper with the scalloped edge one of the hearts pierced by a dart, and wreathed about with flowers, which he had seen in the window in the shop on the Gentlemen's Walk.

Things looked serious, for the very next day was the eve of Saint Valentine! Whatever had to be done must be done now, and though Johnnie found it hard to satisfy himself with his painting, how much harder did Mr Hicks find it to concoct his verses.

Mine, and thine, and valentine were easy rhymes; but how to express devotion, admiration and eternal regard was indeed a poser. Sheet after sheet did poor Mr Hicks tear to shreds, and twist his red locks with one finger in despair.

'Johnnie, my boy, you are a sharp fellow; give us a rhyme for devotion.'

'Potion,' said Johnnie, with a wink of his eye.

'Pooh! that's too like the shop. Though, to be sure, I've heard of love potions.'

Johnnie went on with his picture, which, rough and rude as it was, had its merits. The heart and dart were surmounted by a *bell*, hung over the garland of flowers.

'Have you ever seen her, Johnnie?'

'Who?' asked Johnnie, as he put finishing touches to his picture. 'Who do ye mean?'

'My angel, for whom I design this humble offering.' And Mr Hicks held up a thin silver chain with a cornelian heart appended to it. Elegant, ain't it—fit for the genteelest of the genteel?'

Johnnie nodded.

'She is the fairest and loveliest of her sex. Ah! I have it. I never thought of vex as a rhyme for sex.'

And the curly red hair fell over Mr Hicks's forehead again as he bent over the page and began,—

'O fairest of thy sex,
How doth my spirit vex
For near approach to thee;
Who, when I long to see,
As longs the prisoner for the light
When plunged in darkest night,
Scorn not my humble rhyme,

Accept this offering of mine,
And let it be the chain,
Never to break again,
Which binds you to your valentine.'

'Hearken, John Crome; leave your daubs for a minute, can't you, and let me read my verses.'

'Go on,' was the reply.

When the verses were read in a sort of stage whisper, Mr Hicks said,—

'What do ye think of 'em, eh?'

'P'r'aps she don't want to be your valentine; p'r'aps—'

'Ah, my boy, I've seen her blush like a rose when I've looked at her in church.'

'P'r'aps she don't like being stared at,' John said again.

'You are a young fool,' was the reply, as Mr Hicks left the surgery to answer a bell which tingled above his head, over the door leading into the house, and hastened to take orders from Dr Rigby.

When he was gone, John Crome put his drawing on the shelf, where rows of phials and pill-

boxes were arranged, and surveyed it from a distance with a critical eye, putting his head on one side, shutting one eye, and making a telescope of his little, grimy fingers, through which he looked with increasing dissatisfaction at his performance.

Unlike Mr Hicks, he was far from content with his work, but he had no other sheet of paper, and it must be left on the doorstep of Mrs Lulham's house the next evening.

A far more serious matter now occupied him. The golden guinea had been folded in several labels for phials, taken from the drawer where they were kept for use when wanted.

John Crome now took it out of its hiding-place, under the broken tray of the paint-box, where he had stuffed it in one of the divisions for the paints.

John Crome was sorely perplexed to know what to do with his treasure. As he took it from the folds of paper, his eye caught the words on one—'Not to be taken'—the printed instructions for a bottle of lotion.

'*Not to be taken!* No, it ain't mine. Wish

it was. Never knew it was a guinea till I got it out of my mouth that evening. But who is the lady? Chance if I can see her again, and I'd like the shilling, that I would, to buy some toffy to leave with the valentine. Wish I could get the shilling out of the guinea—a guinea is is twenty-one shillings. Lord! what a fortune. It would buy that picture of the pretty lady; it would buy a chain and heart like Joe Hicks's; it would buy scores of things—but— Shall I keep it? Nobody will know.'

It was a sore temptation to the boy, who had never possessed a shilling he could call his own, far less a golden guinea, and who longed for many pretty things the money would buy. For John Crome, living as he did with sordid surroundings, was alive to beauty when he saw it, and knew and *felt* it when he saw it.

Thus the memory of Bell's golden head, of her cheeks with the colour of the wild roses in the Lakenham lanes, her sweet mouth and the little, slender fingers laid caressingly on Howson's knee, in the fitful blaze of the bright fire, had never left him.

He would make Bell his Valentine; only how he longed for that shilling to buy her something better than the poor attempt he had made to paint a heart and dart, and wreaths of flowers under the bell which was suspended from some unseen beam by a red cord.

With a sigh John Crome took his picture in his hand and refolded his guinea in the label—the words '*Not to be taken*' seeming to stare at him with threatening distinctness.

He had only just time to hide his treasure in his deep pocket, and slip his valentine under a sheet of paper, when one of Dr Rigby's servants came hurrying in.

'Here, Crome! Lor! you must be off to Raynes, the cook-shop on the Gentlemen's Walk, and take this note from the missus. There ain't enough oyster patties sent, and there's another pot of calf's-foot jelly wanting. Come, stir your stumps, and I say, Crome, if you'll be quick, I'll let you stand on the top stair and you'll have a view of the company coming in to the party. There's Miss Woodrow coming and Mr Royston. That'll be a

match, so cook says, and she ought to know as she is first cousin to the old couple who live at Woodrow's in Castle Meadow. It's a crying shame, though, for he is as old as her father, but rolling in money. As you'll be near the shop, run in and buy me a stick of sealing-wax. I've knitted a pair of socks for—ah! that's a secret. I hope I shall get a valentine. Now, run, there's a good boy. If I could afford it, I'd send you a valentine; but you may get one—who knows? No paper trumpery for me; I like a good article that will last.'

John Crome hastened to do his errand, the first of many that afternoon, and as Mr Hicks had the honour of an invitation to appear at the *soirée*, John Crome had to keep guard in the surgery, and be ready to answer the bell if any urgent summons came for the doctor or Mr Hicks.

He heard the tramp of feet about seven o'clock in Willow Lane, at the corner of which Dr Rigby's house was situated.

He knew the men were carrying the ladies

in chairs to the party, and then there was the roll of a few carriages, which brought the 'county' guests from Heigham, or Thorpe, or Catton. Johnnie crept to the foot of the back stairs, wondering if his friend the housemaid had forgotten her promise. The surgery was on the basement floor and on a level with the kitchen.

There was a cupboard where brushes were kept at the head of the stairs, and a box, which John knew very well, as he filled it daily with logs of firewood, was close to it.

A flickering oil lamp hung over the stairs, but at the end of the passage there was a baize door which was generally shut, but this evening was set open. Beyond, all was light and brightness. Dr Rigby did not spare candles in sconces against the walls, and Johnnie could see the guests as they went in and out of the parlour, where tea and muffins were served, before they went upstairs to the large reception-rooms where the music was performed.

The chief performer was a famous singer from the Opera, Signor Pacchierotti, who had lately come to Norwich. His presence was an

inducement to Mrs Lulham to sing her best, and her voice was soon resounding through the house in one of the florid Italian airs then becoming popular.

Dr Burney was also present, and a goodly gathering of the musical and literary celebrities of the time.

Norwich, at the end of the last century and the early part of the nineteenth, was considered as the centre of intellectual life in the east of England, and indeed few provincial towns rivalled it in this respect.

Long after the greater part of the company had assembled, a sedan chair was put down in the hall, and John Crome, from his post of observation, saw the lady step out whose purse he had picked up.

Mr Hicks sprang forward to take the long cloak from her shoulders, and at the same moment Hyacinth Woodrow felt her gown pulled, and, looking down, she saw a little, shabby figure, and a pair of roguish eyes were lifted to hers as a voice said in the broadest of Norfolk dialect,—

'You gave me a golden guinea, miss, instead of a shilling, t'other evening. I haven't got the shilling out of it, 'cause I didn't know how.'

'How dare you put your grimy fingers on the lady's gown! Get along with you, Crome.'

'Oh, do not speak to him so roughly. He is a very good, honest boy. I wondered what had become of the guinea.'

'Here 'tis, miss,' and Johnnie proceeded to take it from the depths of the pocket where he had thrust it in haste when the housemaid came with the orders that he was to run at once to the confectioner's. 'Here's the guinea, miss, wrapped up in this paper. I have felt of it dozens of times, and then put it away. Take it, miss, do 'ee, and if you could be so kind, would you give me a shilling?'

'I will give you more than a shilling, you honest child.' Then, turning to a man who had just arrived, the brightest colour rising to her fair cheeks, she said, 'Mr Sandford, have you any change with you? I want to reward this boy for his honesty.'

'Get along with you,' Mr Hicks repeated. 'You dare to speak to this lady!'

Hyacinth seemed to ignore Mr Hicks's presence. She was unfolding the guinea from its paper, and laughing merrily she said as she read the words on the label—'Not to be taken',—'You have obeyed that instruction; and see here, I will give you a crown piece. This gentleman will lend it to me. You well deserve it. What is your name?'

'John Crome, miss. I'm only the surgery boy. Lor, you don't mean you'll give me this, do you?'

'I do indeed, and I hope if ever I drop a purse again it will be picked up by an honest little boy like you.'

Then turning to Philip Sandford she said,—

'We must go into the drawing-room now; take the guinea as a hostage that you will be paid honestly.'

Philip Sandford refused to take the gold piece, saying,—

'I am only too proud to have been of service; you must know that I only wish I could serve you better.'

He bent over her as he spoke, offered his arm, and Hyacinth, putting her hand into it, they went slowly to the foot of the stairs.

'A handsome pair!' said one of the servants. 'And what a pretty gown that is, and only cheap material.'

'And the reticule hanging at her side, from the yellow riband—so elegant, ain't it?'

Poor Mr Hicks watched the retreating figure with envious eyes. He felt keenly aggrieved that the fair lady for whom he had written the Valentine verses had seemed entirely unconscious of his presence.

He vented his indignation by a kick on John Crome's back, which sent him sprawling on the floor.

'Be off with you to your right place; it ain't here,' he said. 'And the surgery bell may have rung a dozen times, and no one there.'

But Johnnie picked himself up, holding his precious crown piece in his little hot hand. He made a grimace at his tormentor and said,—

'Is yon lady your Valentine? You ain't going to be hers. That's plain!'

John scuttled off without waiting for another kick, and when alone in the surgery he cut a variety of capers for pure joy.

He stood on his head and turned a somersault; he made the phials and gallipots jingle as he jumped about, saying to himself, 'A crown! a crown! I'll buy a picture, and a real good box of colours, and a brush, and—'

He was interrupted by the surgery bell, and, opening the door, saw his mother standing there.

'What's up, mother?'

'Let me come in, child; I'm starved with cold, and father is so out of sorts. He can't get paid for the last bit of cloth, and it's a shame, that it is. I have not a sixpenny-bit to buy food, and little Peg is ill, and—well, my heart's nearly broke.'

Johnnie listened to his mother's wailing, but did not speak at first.

'Let me sit down, child; I'm almost fainting. Can you mix a draught for Peg — her hands are like burning coal, that they are. Why, whatever is this?' she said, taking up the sheet on which Johnnie had painted his valentine.

Mrs Crome had always an objection to her son's scratching, as she called it. She was a homely working woman, who had a hard struggle to keep herself and her sickly husband and daughter from starving.

Johnnie's love of the beautiful was not inherited from his mother; his surroundings from his babyhood had been sordid and mean. But who can tell how the flame of genius is kindled. It is a gift which transfigures the life of the humblest, and creates its own paradise.

The little, poorly-clothed surgery boy, with his far-seeing, dark eyes shining from under his rough, unkempt locks, possessed this gift, and no untoward circumstances could destroy it, though they might dim its brightness and hinder the possessor from attaining his ideals.

'You're always messing with paint and pencil. I dare say the doctor 'll be sending you off if you go on like this. It's all very fine to draw a heart with an arrow sticking in it; you'd best think of my poor heart which will be broken outright if you are

given warning to leave the doctor. Lor, it's a hard world, that it is; some folks up, t'others down. There's music going on, and the front of the house in Saint Giles' all lit up, and somebody screaming like Bedlam!'

Why was Johnnie so silent? Generally he had a saucy word ready for his mother and one of his expressive grimaces, but now he was quiet and made no rejoinder. The precious crown piece was in the depths of his trouser pocket, and a battle was going on as to its destination.

'Well,' his mother said, 'to-morrow is your pay day—I shall get the shilling then—and I've patched your old trousers with a bit left when father cut the cloth from the loom. It ain't a match, but it's better than rags.'

Pay day! yes, Saturday was his pay day, and the shilling would go to his mother. But how about the crown piece?

His mother's pale, woe-begone face touched him. The visions of the picture, the paint-box and the brush had been so fair.

No more operations on the cat's tail, no more desperate efforts to get enough colour from the

morsels of paint still left in the square divisions of Mrs Rigby's discarded box, no more hunting about for bits of paper, for he could buy sheets of real good paper on which the colours would not sink in and blot. Johnnie went on pounding rhubarb in the mortar, and mixing it with some sugar for a powder for his sister Peg. It was more than doubtful if the powder would be of any benefit to the child, but Mrs Crome had faith in a dose of physic, quite irrespective of what its effects might be.

She watched her boy with some pride as his fingers folded the powder in a blue paper, tucked in neatly at both ends.

'You are very notable, Johnnie, with your hands; I wish you'd been a girl.'

'*I don't*,' said Johnnie, roused at last. Then he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the crown piece. 'Here, mother, I'll keep my wage to-morrow, and you take this.'

'Lor bless the boy! how did you come by it? Five shillings, as I'm alive! You've got it honestly, John?'

'There's a question to ask me. You might say thank ye.'

'I do, I do. You are a good boy, that you are, and you'll be rewarded. Give me a kiss,' Mrs Crome cried as she took the precious crown in her thin hand, with the blue paper containing the powder for Peg.

She went out into the night, hastening to a cook-shop to buy some Norfolk dumplings, a little dripping and Yarmouth bloaters, telling herself that it was a blessing to have a good boy like Johnnie; for no doubt, as he grew older, he would give up messing and meddling with pencil and paint, and rise—who could tell?—to be a real assistant to a doctor, like that august personage, Mr Hicks.

And how about Johnnie? When the door had closed on his mother, he stretched himself on the hard floor of the surgery, face downwards, and buried in his arms.

If hot tears were forcing themselves through his fingers, who can wonder? And who can help admiring the resolution of the lad—thus to give up what would have provided him with such long-coveted delight.

CHAPTER IV

A MUSICAL EVENING

A SOIRÉE at Dr Rigby's was always considered an entertainment for which the leading people of the city and neighbourhood of Norwich desired an invitation.

But this evening, as very often happens on occasions of the kind in our own time, there were little by-plays going on during the pauses between the music, when the fine singing of Signor Pacchierotti, the performance of Mrs Lulham, and of various other less distinguished artists, were not the most interesting topics of conversation between two people engrossed with each other's presence.

In all that assembly of fair ladies and gentlemen, there were none happier than Hyacinth Woodrow and Philip Sandford.

They were together in a little ante-room in a

deep window-seat, over which a crimson damask curtain was draped, partially concealing them from those in the large drawing-room. Hyacinth wore a simple white gown, with a yellow sash tied under her arms, the ends of which reached the bottom of the skirt. It suited her perfectly in its simplicity, her beautiful hair dressed high on her shapely head, with little curls escaping from the bandeau of the same colour as the sash, and what was then called a reticule hanging at her side, where a vinaigrette and a small ivory fan were kept, with her handkerchief, in case of need.

Young ladies of those days were supposed to faint at the least provocation, and smelling-salts and little silver or tortoise-shell boxes, known as vinaigrettes, were always taken to a party or to church in little bags worn at the side.

Hyacinth Woodrow was not one of the young women who screamed at the sight of a spider or caterpillar, or went into hysterics if they thought they did not receive sufficient admiration. Nevertheless, the reticule and its contents were the necessary accompaniments of her toilette, and could not be neglected.

The young man to whom her father had referred with angry contempt as a 'clerk in a bank' was sunning himself in her smiles. If there had been any doubt in Hyacinth's mind that he had loved her, it was dispelled now. He had told her in a few straightforward, manly words that he had only one great hope to cheer him on his way, and that hope was to win her love in return.

Although he called her 'madam,' and made his confession of love in what in our degenerate times would be laughed at as formal, he indulged in none of the extravagant expressions of devotion as her slave, which had disgusted her from her elderly admirer.

Philip Sandford was tall and slender. There was nothing remarkable in his appearance, except, perhaps, the wonderful depth and expressiveness of his eyes. They kindled now with a lambent light, as Mr Mulley, a leading music master in Norwich, played the Pastoral Symphony from the 'Messiah,' on the small chamber organ at the far end of the large drawing-room.

Philip was silent now, and the sense of ex-

quisite enjoyment which music always gave him was heightened by the sweet presence of Hyacinth at his side, who had but a few minutes before given him his heart's desire and responded to his love.

As they sat together in the first joy of mutual love, the strains of that sweet symphony seemed to bring them something of the calm and peace under the midnight sky centuries ago, when the stars kept watch over the cradle at Bethlehem.

The peace which was shed over these two happy lovers was, at a pause in the music, rudely broken.

Before they were aware of it, Mr Royston stood before them. He ignored Philip's presence altogether; but bowing low to Hyacinth, prayed to be allowed to conduct her to the room where refreshments were laid out for the guests.

'Come, my fair lady, show your forgiveness for my tardy appearance by permitting me to have the pleasure of your society for the remainder of the evening. Too short a time, I know, but we will make the best of our opportunities.'

All this was accompanied by a variety of ridiculous gestures and a bold stare, which made the hot blood rise to Philip's usually pale face.

There was nothing left for Hyacinth but to walk down the room with Mr Royston, and she was miserably conscious that all eyes were upon her.

Dr Alderson was amongst the company, with his little daughter, afterwards so well known as Amelia Opie, who was, even at that tender age, full of sparkle and sauciness, and said, 'May and December, father—look, father!'

'Hush! hush! my little girl, you must not be so free with that sharp tongue of yours.'

'Who is she, father?'

'The daughter of an old hypochondriac of whom our friend Rigby, here, knows something.'

'Ah,' Dr Rigby said, 'I do know; and what an angel of patience that girl is!' Then, turning to Philip Sandford, who stood a little apart, 'Give little Miss Alderson your arm, Sandford, and find her some refreshment.'

'It has been a feast of music this evening,'

Amelia Alderson said, 'but for my part I like a little cheerful talk, and we had to be so quiet while the people were too-te-too-ing. You think me a perfect Goth I see, sir,' she said, lifting her pretty, piquant face to Philip. 'I like singing. I can sing myself, but I do not care for these big, long pieces; and as to the "Menuet de la Cour," I was in a fever all the time to dance, and could scarce keep my toes quiet.'

Philip was in no mood at first to listen to the chatter of his companion. He felt inclined to be angry that Hyacinth allowed herself to be led away by Mr Royston, and resented bitterly that what had been such a blissful hour should have had this conclusion.

But Amelia Alderson was bewitching and irresistible, although she was at this time only nine or ten years old. The tie between the father and daughter was very strong, and the most entire sympathy existed between them, so that the child was far beyond her age in intelligence.

Amelia Alderson could not understand why Dr Rigby said the beautiful young lady on the

arm of the old beau, Mr Royston, wanted patience to deal with her father.

'Doesn't he love her,' she asked Philip, 'as my father loves me? Mother says he spoils me, and she did not wish me to come here to-night.'

'Mr Woodrow has a strange way of showing his love, Miss Amelia,' Philip replied.

'So has yonder old gentleman,' Amelia said, laughing. 'Oh, I should be fain to box his ears if he leaned over me in that fashion.'

Philip turned hastily away. 'Let me conduct you to another part of the table,' he said, 'near Mrs Rigby.'

Hyacinth followed Philip with her eyes, and became more and more oppressed with the unwelcome attentions forced on her, which were too obtrusive to escape notice.

Little Amelia Alderson was all eyes and ears, and had the art of listening and talking at the same time. She was interested in hearing Mrs Malley and Mrs Lulham speaking of a baby of not three years old who had an extraordinary ear for music, 'and not an ear only—the child can play in harmony the whole of "God save

the King," though his fingers can scarce stretch to the notes.'

'Do hearken, sir,' Amelia Alderson said, 'to what they are saying about a prodigy. I must inquire who it is.'

'Pray, madam,' Miss Alderson said across the table, addressing Mrs Lulham, 'where is this astounding infant to be found?'

'At Mr Crotch's, the carpenter, in Saint George's Colegate, madam. I dare to say the parents would be proud to let you hear what the child can do if you honoured them with a visit. Mr Crotch himself is a musician, untutored, and with no great execution, but he has built an organ of no mean capabilities.'

'Dear, what interesting people they must be!' Amelia Alderson exclaimed. 'I must make an expedition to Saint George's with all speed. I love to hear and see any extraordinary thing.'

'Ah, Miss Amelia,' Mr Mulley said, 'if I may venture to predict that baby's future, it will be that he will never make any mark in the world. It is just a flash and sparkle, and will soon be extinguished. I have known like cases of an

infant prodigy, when old enough to be put to real, steady work, rebel, and nothing came of all his boasted infantine talents. Depend on it, these poor parents are making a vast mistake in talking so big about the child's performances; they are only laughed at for their pains.'

'Well,' Mrs Lulham said, 'for my part I cannot join in the laughter. I believe we shall hear more of little William Crotch ere long. I would like to venture on asking Signor Pacchierotti to pay the Crotches a visit, did I not fear to take the liberty.'

Signor Pacchierotti tossed back his long black hair on hearing his name, and said,—

'What do the signorina say?'

'We are speaking, sir, of a child of scarce three years old, who is amazing some folks in Norwich by his performance on the organ.'

'Scarce three years old? No, no,' Signor Pacchierotti said, shaking his head. 'Perform on the organ? No, no. It is too much—too much.'

'You shall, if it so pleases you, sir, hear him for yourself, and I will conduct you to

his father's house with pleasure,' Mrs Lulham said.

'*Grazia, Grazia,* signorina, but I depart for Yaremouth the day but one after the next, and—'

At this moment Signor Pacchierotti's mouth was full of salad, to which he had helped himself for a third time, so no more was said about little William Crotch, and soon after the party rose up from the supper-table, Dr Alderson tapping his daughter's cheek and saying,—

'It is late. We must call for your chair, Amelia, or you will not get your beauty sleep before midnight. I do not wish my little girl to lose her roses or her mother will reproach me.'

Amelia tripped away, smiling her good-night all round, and making the host and hostess a pretty speech with a graceful curtsey as she took leave, thanking them for the delightful evening she had spent.

How Hyacinth envied her as she passed by her on her proud father's arm.

Young as she was, Amelia Alderson was the good doctor's cherished and constant com-

panion. Her vivacity and ready wit made her a general favourite, and although only fifteen when her mother died, she was to show herself competent to fulfil the duties, social and otherwise, which fell upon her in her father's house.

Hyacinth tried in vain to escape from Mr Royston, and Philip saw it was hopeless to rejoin her. At last, summoning all her courage, Hyacinth said, addressing him,—

'Will you do me the favour, sir, to see if my chair has arrived?'

'Nay, it is too early, fair lady; but I reserve to myself the honour of conducting you to the chair when the moment of separation can be no longer delayed. Sad moment! which I would fain postpone indefinitely. May I ask how you became acquainted with the bashful swain who has been gazing at you with melancholy eyes, even when the brilliant Amelia was at his side?'

'Mr Philip Sandford is your nephew, sir, and my friend, and I am proud to own it. He is coming towards me now to announce that my chair is waiting. I will wish you good-

evening, sir,' and, slipping her hand from Mr Royston's arm, she went quickly towards Mrs Rigby, made her adieux with a curtsey as graceful as little Amelia Alderson's, and, gliding through the crowd collecting near the harpsichord to listen to Signor Pacchierotti's last performance in a duet with Mr Mulley, she flew downstairs, and was in the hall, where the sedan chair waited.

Philip received a smile as he put her into the chair, which almost compensated for the hour of misery he had passed when Mr Royston had taken possession of her, and as the lid of the sedan closed over her, he felt the happy assurance that the magnificent old beau, with his diamond studs and lace frills to cravat and cuffs, was no rival to fear, for Hyacinth's heart was his.

But the little scene in the hall following Hyacinth's abrupt and hasty separation from him did not escape Mr Royston's sharp eyes. Little, cunning eyes they were, and age had not robbed them of their keen, observant power. Whatever else showed signs of advancing years, Mr Royston's eyes did not fail him.

He turned carelessly away from his point of observation at the head of the stairs, and said to his host,—

'Have the goodness, sir, to tell me how it happens that that youth, with a pale face and figure like a lamp-post, is an invited guest in your house? But,' taking a pinch of snuff between his finger and thumb from a richly-chased silver box, and offering it to Dr Rigby, 'I am bound to own he is somewhat uncouth and deficient in the manners of the well born. No offence, I hope, sir.'

'No, sir, no offence—but—I have a regard for young Philip Sandford, and I believe he is your nephew; he is making his own way in life, and has taken a clerkship in the bank in Bank Plain. He is devoted to music, and thus I bid him here this evening. I hope you have found the music to your mind?'

'Ah, yes!' Mr Royston said, taking out a fine handkerchief and flapping the particles of snuff from his frilled shirt. 'Ah, yes! vastly to my mind, but the belle of the evening is more so. I tell you in confidence, doctor, I

am about to marry the fair Miss Hyacinth—a little arrangement between me and her father—acceptable to *him*, and most agreeable to me.'

Mr Royston waited for no congratulations; probably Dr Rigby's significant shrug of the shoulders and half-uttered exclamation of surprise made him feel that his announcement had not given the good doctor any satisfaction. He extended two limp fingers, glittering with rings, to his hostess as he passed with a low bow, and did his best to walk downstairs without holding by the banister. His servant was waiting for him, and enveloped his master in a thick, fur-lined cloak before escorting him to his carriage, which was at the door, and very soon after Mr Royston's departure the lights were put out, and silence reigned in the doctor's house, unless the night bell should ring, and a summons come for him to a sick and dying person, and, whether rich or poor, such a summons never came in vain to Dr Rigby.

CHAPTER V

THE EVE OF SAINT VALENTINE

NORWICH has always been celebrated for the due observance of the Festival of Saint Valentine.

As the twilight of the February evening deepened, the excitement in many houses throughout the old city grew irrepressible. The first peal of the bell at the hall door was eagerly listened for.

The children were all ready to make a dash to be first to secure the first parcel which would be laid on the door-step; and if the elders tried to appear indifferent, they were more full of anticipation than they cared to show.

The loud ringing of the bell would be followed by a general rush and scuffle, and the parcel, addressed in a feigned hand, tossed to the owner. While the papers were torn off and the gift displayed, the rest of the household waited in

breathless expectancy for the second peal, and then, quick and fast, at longer and shorter intervals, the parcels came pouring in for old and young, for children and servants, and all were shrouded in the delightful mystery which enhanced the value of the gift, and gave it its principal charm.

Very often the disguised handwriting and the doggerel rhyme were known at once to be those of someone in the house or a friend from outside, but it was part of the fun to profess ignorance as to who could be the sender of such a beautiful present.

A favourite ruse was to pack up a small brooch or locket in innumerable papers, which exercised the patience of the receiver to unfold, and called forth many exclamations that, after all, there was nothing to be found. Indeed, sometimes a bogus parcel of large dimensions did only contain a tiny bit of sealing-wax or an empty cotton reel; but this was speedily followed by a real present in a neat packet, which consoled the victim of the fraud, and turned something like disappointment and vexation into joyful possession of some coveted trinket or toy.

Johnnie Crome was in his element on this Valentine's Eve.

The basket in which he carried bottles and pill-boxes was now full of parcels, which he was commissioned to leave at certain houses, and to be sure to make no mistakes as to the addresses.

Mr Hicks's silver chain and locket were done up in brown paper and sealed, while Johnnie had been allowed to seal his particular packet also with the red wax, dropping two small drops, according to Mr Hicks's directions, which meant kisses.

'There ain't none on your parcel.'

'No,' Mr Hicks said loftily. 'No, my lady-love is too genteel to admit of such a vulgar expression of regard. But it is all very well for you, for I take it your valentine is a poor child like yourself.'

John Crome nodded; he was not going to expatiate on Bell to Mr Hicks.

'By-the-bye, Crome,' Mr Hicks said, 'what have you done with the crown piece?'

'That's my business,' was the reply, with a knowing wink. 'And now I'm off; it is dark

enough now. Lor, I'd not mind having a valentine—but no such luck.'

Johnnie delighted in giving the bells the most tremendous pulls at the various doors, and running off at full speed when he had done so. He had a pretty long round—two houses in Chapel Field, one in Surrey Street, two in Calvert Street and Magdalen Street, for the Rigbys had many friends, and they lived at different points of the compass.

He had not forgotten his mother and Peg. When sixpence of his well-earned shilling had been spent on his valentine, he had only enough left to buy Peg a wooden doll, with jointed legs and arms, marvellous pink cheeks, her black hair painted in straight lines on either side, and a knob on the crown of her head, coloured yellow, to represent a comb.

Johnnie's artistic soul rebelled against the doll's ugliness, but he consoled himself by thinking Peg would not mind, and it was the best he could get for the money, though he had looked with longing and admiring eyes at a wax beauty, with blue eyes and flaxen curls and rosy lips.

He had asked the price in a moment of curiosity, and received the short answer from the lady behind the counter, 'Half-a-guinea; move away, boy.' A trifle for his mother completed his purchases, and when he had run in every direction with the valentines entrusted to him for his master's family, he clattered up the uneven stair to the two rooms occupied by his father and mother, gave a thundering knock at the door, and ran downstairs again. Then he proceeded to Castle Meadow with Mr Hicks's parcel. As he turned away he saw the figure of a man standing by the iron railings before the houses. It was Philip Sandford waiting his opportunity to deposit his parcel also on the doorstep.

'Good-night, sir,' Johnnie said, 'and good luck with your valentine.'

Philip laughed.

'Ah,' he said, 'you are the honest boy who returned a guinea to a lady who had given you one by mistake. Where are you off to now?'

'I've been taking other folk's valentines for the last hour; now I'm taking one of my own. Suppose that's fair, ain't it?'

'Quite fair, and good luck to you with her.'

'Thank ye, sir,' and then Johnnie was gone.

It gave Philip a strange sense of pleasure to linger near the house where he knew Hyacinth was watching for some sign from him. He saw her open the door, in answer to John Crome's furious peal, and take up the parcel. The light of the lamp behind her threw out Hyacinth's figure, and he saw her tear off the papers of Mr Hicks's present and read the verses enclosed in the parcel.

A merry laugh broke from her as she read, and then the door was shut and Philip still waited. Presently a servant in livery passed him, and opening the little iron gate, marched up the narrow path to the door, giving the regulation ring, and then returning.

Again the door opened and the parcel was picked up by Hyacinth. There was no smile and no laughter this time. She vanished from Philip's sight, and it was Bridget who closed the door. Philip took several turns up and down before the houses, waiting to see how many more valentines would follow.

But there seemed to be no more, and going quickly up to the door he rang the bell and laid down his offering according to the recognised custom of Saint Valentine's Eve, and then took up his former position within sight of the house.

To his disappointment the door was not immediately opened, and he caught sight only of Bridget's bent figure as she took the parcel up and closed the door, but not before he heard the angry, querulous tones of Mr Woodrow's voice raised to their highest pitch, and he knew Hyacinth was suffering from one of those storms of temper in which her father was wont to indulge.

If he could have witnessed what was passing in the parlour, he would have seen Hyacinth standing, with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes, before her father.

A bracelet was in her hand, which presently she flung down on the table by Mr Woodrow's sofa, and with a burst of angry, passionate tears left the room.

Bridget met her in the little lobby.

'Here,' she said, 'is another valentine. There,

there, don't 'ee take on like that; it'll all come right.'

'I will have none of that old man's gifts. My father may give him back the bracelet. I told him so, and that made him go into such a fury. Oh! Bridget, light a candle for me in my room, and leave me—leave me to open my last, best valentine, for I know it is from him.'

'Ay, ay, you make pretty sure of it; but suppose it is from another of your beaux. I warrant you've a score.'

'Don't talk like that; it is too shameful of you when you see I am in such distress; and, Bridget, are you sure, quite sure, Sumpter took that little square parcel to the right number in Queen Street?'

'Sumpter isn't a fool, and knows the way to Queen Street, I hope. But you'd better make it up with the master; these tantrums are very bad for his heart, and he might go off in one all sudden like.'

But Hyacinth was too much engrossed with her last valentine to say any more.

When the parcel was unfastened, she found a little brooch with turquoises set in the form of

forget-me-nots, with tiny pearls in the centre of the flowers. A slip of paper was wrapped round the box, on which was written,—

'Forget-me-nots bring their humble request to Hyacinth from her faithful valentine.'

'And they do not bring their request in vain,' Hyacinth said, pressing the paper to her lips. 'Never, never will I forget, and I will be true while life lasts. I will wait—I will wait if for years, till my hair is grey and my face as full of wrinkles as Bridget's. You need not fear, Philip, I will wait.'

But she little dreamed how long that waiting time would be.

Bell was very much excited about her valentine. She looked at it with pride and consulted Howson as to who could have painted such a lovely picture.

'The bell is so natural,' Howson said; 'it looks as if you might ring it. Oh, I dessay it was bought at a shop on the Gentlemen's Walk.'

'Oh, no, that can't be true, for there are little smudges at the back. It is painted by someone; it wasn't bought. And oh, such a dear weenie thimble. I wish I could thank the person who sent it.'

'That you can't do,' Howson said decidedly. 'Valentines are always from *Anon.*'

'What's that?' Bell asked.

'Well, it's when a thing is given and the giver keeps it dark. I have seen the word in my hymn-book scores of times. But there, don't trouble your head about it. Shouldn't wonder if 'twas Mrs Crotch, as you have taken such a fancy to that baby of hers. He has got water on the brain, and they had better not set store by him. He won't live long. I daresay by this time twelvemonth he will be in his grave.'

'Oh, *don't* say that, Howson, pray don't; besides, how do you know?'

'My dear, a child with blue veins showing on his forehead, and prominent eyes, never lives to grow up. Little Crotch is not long for this world; 'tis to be hoped he'll have music enough in the next.'

CHAPTER VI

WAYWARD WILL

A GENTLEMAN who was walking past Mr Crotch's house a few days later suddenly stopped short and exclaimed,—

'Ah, my fine fellow, that won't do, shamming illness to stay at home and play the organ. No, no! I'm up to your tricks!'

The gentleman was Mr Paul, the master carpenter who employed Crotch and set store on his skilful workmanship.

He knocked at the door with some irritation, and marched into the room whence the sounds of the organ proceeded. He began,—

'Well, Crotch, not much amiss,' and then exclaimed, 'Good heavens! is that baby playing on the organ?'

'Yes, sir,' Mrs Crotch said. She was sit-

ting on the bench, holding the child on her knee, while her eldest boy was blowing the bellows.

She tried to stop little Will, out of respect to Mr Paul, but he fought out vehemently with his tiny fists, and cried and screamed till his mother let him go on.

Mr Paul stood in amazement as the child went on, producing an air he had caught up, and playing the chords as far as his fingers could reach in perfect harmony.

Poor Crotch himself was lying on his bed upstairs, prostrate with a nervous headache, to which he was subject. But hearing voices, and the sound of the organ, he came creeping down, and, to his surprise, saw Mr Paul standing transfixed, as the little musician went on, entirely unconcerned, and taking no heed of his listener.

'I thought you were shamming, Crotch,' Mr Paul said. 'I beg your pardon, but who could have believed a baby like that could be playing on the organ. You must make something of him, my good man. It

is astounding, perfectly astounding. Have the musical folks heard him?'

'Mr Mulley, sir, and Mrs Lulham have been here, and the child is now playing what he heard Mr Mulley play yesterday. It is all wild and confused, but I can hear the air, and I fancy he will catch hold of more in time. Stop, Will!' his father said, 'and give us "God save King George."' Will took no notice of his father's words but went on, his blue eyes raised and his little face aglow with determination to play as he had said to his mother 'the gentleman's fine thing.'

'He is like a child possessed when he is at the organ, sir,' Mrs Crotch said in apology. 'He won't listen to anyone, and goes his own way.'

'Yes; he is a wilful little chap, and no mistake,' his father said. 'Will, Will, my boy, why won't you let this gentleman hear "God save King George?"' Will took no notice of his father, but went on rolling out chords and pressing his little fingers down with marvellous power and precision. 'You might as lief tell the wind not to blow.'

The brother who was at the bellows said,—

'If I get tired and stop a bit, he'll up with his hand and smack me on the face.'

'And yet there can't be a better child when the music fit isn't on him,' Mrs Crotch, mother-like, interposed.

'Well, well, you'll make something of him,' Mr Paul said. 'Good-day to you, and go back to your bed, Crotch, and don't go to your work to-morrow if you ain't better. You look like a ghost, I declare.'

The report of little Will Crotch's performances now spread amongst the neighbours. Those who had scoffed and thought the father and mother made themselves a laughing-stock when they boasted of their little son's genius, were now only too ready to applaud him. The very next day the door of the carpenter's house was surrounded with people anxious to be admitted.

Fashion held its sway over the good citizens of Norwich a hundred years ago, as no doubt it does at the present time, and when it became known that Mr Mulley intended to bring the Italian musician to hear Will play, and that Dr Burney

had declared his intention of coming to test the truth of the report about the child's extraordinary gifts, there was a perpetual influx of visitors begging to be allowed to hear little Will perform.

It became necessary to limit the exhibition to certain days and hours, for the child showed signs of fatigue, and on several occasions had fallen into a doze over the keys, and his mother had taken him in her arms and soothed him to rest after his performance.

Dr Rigby, who had come to prescribe for Mr Crotch, seemed to take the same view of Will's delicacy as Howson, and warned Mrs Crotch that she must be careful not to allow him to overtax his strength at the organ.

'He will only play, sir, when he has a mind to do so, and he will lie on the floor drawing by the hour together, and some people say his drawing is as wonderful as his playing. For all this, he is a child in his ways, and there is is a little girl who comes to see him who plays with him just as any other child would play. It is pretty to see them together. Little Bell

Lulham is the singer's orphan niece, and a pretty creature with winning ways, and she just sets her heart on Will.'

This was indeed true; Bell seemed wrapped up in little Will. She had never known what it was to have a playfellow, and had led a lonely life in her aunt's house. Her father was dead and she had never lived with him. Of her mother she had no memory, and Howson was always very willing to turn aside any questions Bell might ask her. But now every day when she came from school Bell stopped at Mr Crotch's house, and Will would welcome her with outstretched arms, and if he was in the mood he would play with her with a set of ninepins or other childish toys. But sometimes she would, at his mother's desire, try in vain to tempt him to leave his beloved organ, and he would go on, heedless of anyone's presence, or caring for what was said to him. Bell was satisfied to sit at one corner of the bench before the organ, with her arm round him, and watch his little, lithe fingers at work.

Sometimes she would take the place of his

brother and blow the bellows till her arms ached, but she never thought of stopping till someone came to relieve her. It was enough for her that she was doing what Will liked. As the days went on, the child's genius developed more and more. He could play the Easter hymn in full harmony, and in the last three bars of the Hallelujah, where the sound is sustained, he actually played chords with both hands, though he had great difficulty in reaching the notes with his tiny fingers.

The visit of the Italian master, Signor Pacchierotti, was not very successful. Will was not in a mood for showing off, and he shrank from the dark-eyed gentleman, with his long black hair and strange gestures, for, like all of his race, he made his meaning known more by movement of hands, arms and shoulders than by words.

Will sat nestling up to his mother when Signor Pacchierotti played and sang, and at first seemed quite unmoved by the performance.

Presently he called out in his shrill baby treble,—

'He's singing in F.'

'What says he—eh?' the signor asked. 'Sing in F. Well said! Bravo! he does know the key, and he is a clever child, but'—with an ominous shake of his head—'it will not last—it will die. He is too young—a bambino, nothing beside.'

It was a sweet, fair, quiet Sunday, a week after Saint Valentine's Eve, when, to Bell's delight, Mr Crotch invited her to go with him and little Will to the Cathedral for the afternoon service.

They set out early and had time to walk round the gardens of the Upper Close, under the trees beginning to show the russet tints of spring on the lower branches. Above them the Cathedral spire soared into the blue sky, where a flock of soft, white clouds were scarcely moving in the calm, still air.

Little Will walked with one hand in Bell's and another in his father's. He had been carried through the streets, but as soon as they had passed under the Erpingham gateway he had been set upon his feet, and danced with springing steps as the first peal of bells chimed for the service. Poor little boy! his pleasure was of short duration. When he entered the nave he seemed

awestruck by its size, and looked up and around him with a wistful gaze.

They passed along to the seats at the back of the choir, and they had scarcely seated themselves when the voluntary pealed forth from the organ its great waves of sound, and Will buried his face in his father's arm. At first he thought it was from the pleasure the music gave him, but he was soon undeceived. The child began to cry piteously, and beckoning Bell to follow, Mr Crotch, having failed to quiet him, hastened away before the verger in charge of that part of the Cathedral had time to repeat his order—

'Take that child out. What did ye bring him for?'

What indeed? That which had been planned as a great treat turned out to be a vexatious disappointment.

'Why, Will, I thought you'd love to hear the grand organ! What made you cry out like that?'

'It was too loud for him,' Bell said wisely. 'It made his head ache, p'r'aps.'

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Will was grateful to Bell for saying this, for it exactly expressed what he felt. He showed his gratitude by bending down from his father's arms and saying through his tears and choking sobs,—

'Kiss, Bell, kiss.'

Then they walked down to the Lower Close to Pull's Ferry, and watched the Sunday holiday-makers crossing the river in the wide-bottomed ferry boat for a ramble on Mousehold Heath, or by the side of the sluggish Yare as far as Thorpe.

Will was soon comforted, and sat contentedly on his father's knee, listening to the ripple of the water against the sides of the boat, and the distant sound of a horn at the barracks on the opposite side of the river.

Mr Crotch had seated himself on a stump of a tree which had been felled many a year before. And Bell walked along the few yards to the left of the Ferry House, thinking how sorry she was Will had cried at the Cathedral. She would have so much liked to stay and hear the boys in their white gowns sing.

A boy's figure was stretched out on a little patch of coarse grass, and as Bell's light footsteps were heard, the boy raised his head, and in another moment he was sitting upright.

Here was his valentine! How jealous he was of the large bonnet which hid the rings of golden-bronze hair, and shadowed the sweet face beneath them. Bell walked demurely past Johnnie Crome in her limited patrol several times, and, giving him a shy glance, did not seem to recognise him.

At her approach the third time he said,—

'I say, miss, haven't you got a word to give a chap?'

'Oh,' Bell said, blushing like a rose, 'I see you are Dr Rigby's boy, who brought Aunt Lulham the physic.'

'Ain't I more nor that?' Johnnie asked.

'More? How can you be more?'

Johnnie's roguish eyes twinkled.

'Suppose I was your valentine? I don't say I was, you know; but I say, suppose I was?'

Bell looked at him with her lovely eyes, clear and blue as the sky above her head.

'If you mean you really sent me that weenie thimble and the pretty picture, well, I am very thankful to you.'

'And you'll let me be your valentine, for I tell 'ee you are mine. I wish you'd take off your bonnet one minute that I might see your hair.'

'Indeed I shall do no such thing, and you are a rude boy to ask me.' With this Bell turned away and rejoined Mr Crotch and Will, who began to be restless and wanted to go home.

John Crome followed her with his eyes till she was out of sight. Then he became engrossed with watching how the westering sun was lighting up the slope of Mousehold, and telling himself if he had the chance he would make a picture of the little quaint figure in the big bonnet, and put Mousehold Heath, with the sunlight on it, behind her.

'Suppose I'd kept that crown piece, I could have bought a lot of paints and brushes, and—but what's the use of thinking,' and John Crome sprang to his feet, and going to the ferryman, said,—

'Give us a lift across.'

'Where's your penny?'

'Haven't got one.'

And as the man let the heavy chain, which moored the boat to a post, fall with a clatter into it, he jumped from the wooden steps into it, making two women cry out in alarm.

'You'll be upsetting the boat, you young rascal.'

'A big old tub like this ain't like to be upset, but a ducking wouldn't hurt you.'

'What impudence, to be sure!' was the wrathful reply.

'Come, come, young jackanapes,' the ferryman said, 'this is nice behaviour. I'll give you a ducking if you don't look out; and where's your penny?' he bawled, as Johnnie had sprung out of the boat as quickly as he had sprung in, and turning, made a very inelegant grimace at the ferryman as he raced off.

John Crome had, like many of us, two sides to his nature. Who would have thought the uncouth boy in his shabby clothes and his rough, untidy hair bristling from under a battered, three-cornered cap which his mother had picked up for

a trifle at an old clothes shop in Bridge Street, who was scudding along the river bank full speed, had the keenest delight in all things that were fair and lovely in the world around him, and that he was inspired by them, with the longing of the true artist, to reproduce them and make them his own.

Who could have believed that Johnnie Crome, who had so impudently cheated the ferryman of his dues, was one and the same with the boy who had so valiantly resisted the temptation to keep the guinea given him by mistake, and had denied himself the coveted possession of all that piece of money would buy, by handing over the crown piece to his mother to get the necessary food for his sick father and weakly little sister.

The footpath, raised high above the river, led under a bridge to the Boom Tower, which was half ruined, and stood exactly opposite another, of which scarcely more than the fragments remained.

These towers were built centuries ago, as a protection against intruders. Strong chains were fastened across the river from one to the other, and the warders kept a sharp lookout before the

chains were lowered, the dues paid, and the vessels allowed to pass.

These were the times when the Danes were troublesome neighbours to all the East Coast of England, and the towers were well supplied with ammunition and cross-bows in case of need, hence the name of Bomb or Boom Tower. The walk by the Yare was a favourite resort of Norwich citizens, and lovers lingered on the banks and found a resting-place in the ruin of the least decayed of the Bomb Towers, where children played hide-and-seek amongst the fragments of stones which lay scattered about on the turf-grown floor.

Johnnie climbed half-way up the outside of the Tower, by putting his feet in the interstices between the stones, and, looking over the broken battlements when he reached the top, saw two figures below which seemed familiar to him. His dark head was just above the edge of the uneven stones, and he was unperceived by those below.

'It's my lady,' he said to himself, 'my lady and the gentleman who gave her the crown t'other

night. My! she is crying, I declare. Is he cross with her? If he is, I'd like to fight him.'

Presently, on other people coming into the ruins, the two who had been in such earnest conversation left it, and Johnnie scrambled down from his high position, and followed them at a distance; for the evening was closing in, and though the sun had left an after-glow in the sky, the river was dark in shadow and gloom.

John Crome did not attempt to cross the ferry, but turned up to the bridge, and went across Tombland to his father's house in the Castle Ditches.

These Sunday afternoon rambles, after his week's confinement to the doctor's surgery, were the one refreshment of his life. Running about with medicine gave him a certain amount of exercise, but he longed for freedom, and for a few blissful hours on Sunday afternoon he enjoyed it

As he passed a public-house on his way, he saw a knot of people standing over a sign-board, which had fallen with its face to the ground, and was cracked across.

Johnnie pushed his way through the little crowd, and heard a fierce altercation going on between the landlord of the 'Maid's Head' and a man who had lifted the poor 'Maid's Head' and was examining the iron rod which had held her in her place.

'You don't dare to tell me you made the screws strong. There has not been a puff of wind, and naught to bring down the sign. I've paid forty shillings for that sign, and it is one of Whisler's best; and I'm not going to pay you a brass farthing for your work, I can tell you. The picture is ruined!'

'A dab or two of paint would set it right,' the man replied.

'Never! There is a crack right across the nose. The thing is ruined!'

John Crome listened to what was being said, and examined the sign with much interest.

'Forty shillings for doing of that. I'll have a try, and do better, and see if I don't!' he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VII

A CUNNING SCHEME

THE parlour of the leading firm of Norwich bankers was a sacred place, where the partners sat in deliberation over bills and over drafts, and decided what accommodation could be given and what refused.

The business was steadily on the increase, but there had been some losses on securities of late, and the three worthy gentlemen, one of whom was a Quaker, were not in the most serene temper.

The head clerk's appearance with a card was received with a sharp 'Who is it? who is it? We are engaged.'

'Oh!' said the senior partner, fitting a pair of large gold spectacles on his nose. 'Oh! Mr Royston; show him in, show him in.'

In another moment Mr Royston made his

appearance with bows and profuse apologies for disturbing a consultation.

'It is all in the way of business, sir,' one of the partners said—'all in the way of business.'

'Let us hope so,' came from the tall, thin Quaker, with keen eyes which seemed to look the old fop through and through, and with a cynical smile on his thin lips. 'Let us hope so; business must come before compliments.'

'Well, sir, my business is of a somewhat private nature; but,' looking round with a bland smile, 'I take it, all I say will be regarded as confidential.'

'A needless remark; that all that passes in this room is private thee knows.'

'Ah! quite confidential. Gentlemen, you have a young man in your service, my nephew by marriage—only by marriage—by name Sandford.'

'Yes, a very decent, respectable fellow he is; we took him, sir, on your recommendation.'

'Quite true, sir; his father was a poor parson, and he left his family penniless. My poor, deluded half-sister made a *mésalliance*,' Mr Royston said, 'and it is in his interests, gentlemen, that I am here

with a request. It has come to my ears that this young man has an entanglement in Norwich.'

'An entanglement! Tut! tut! be explicit, sir.'

'It is nothing very serious,' Mr Royston said, crossing his legs and stroking his silk stocking with one hand, while with the other he laid his gold-headed cane across his knees. 'What I desire to represent to you, gentlemen, is, that you would do this youth a good service by sending him out of reach of—well, of temptation. To be candid, he is persecuting a young gentlewoman I have the honour to know with unwelcome attentions, and if distance is put between him and her, the relief will be vastly appreciated. I thought it might be possible for you, taking a kindly interest in this young man, to commend him to some merchant's firm who want a good accountant and business man to despatch at this critical time to America; or failing that, a transfer to Darlington, where you have a connection with the bank, might be an alternative. By-the-bye, I am forgetting that I have a draft here for three thousand odd, which I wish to place to my credit,' and taking out a pocket-book,

which had a sweet scent of Russia leather and was fastened with a gold clasp, Mr Royston drew from it a draft and laid it on the table.

The balance to his credit was already large, and this addition would raise it considerably.

The junior partner smiled and bowed as he possessed himself of the draft, with, 'Thank thee kindly,' from the keen-sighted Quaker, who had evidently considered this was business and not compliment.

'We must speak to Sandford,' another partner said, the rosy-faced, bluff gentleman, who drove in every morning to the bank from his country house. 'We must speak to Sandford, and—'

But Mr Royston interposed.

'May I beg that you do not mention my name in the matter, sir?'

'Well, well, I like everything to be straight and above-board, and for my part, I think we shall do well to keep this young man in our employ, and I am sure we are all agreed that he is a good clerk—a very good clerk. Parker, our head cashier, was speaking in high terms of him only the other day.'

'Well,' Mr Royston said, 'I leave it in your hands, gentlemen, and should an opportunity occur, you will oblige *me* if you can remove this young man—to a good post, of course. I bear him no ill-will. I am speaking from disinterested motives, anxious to protect a charming young gentlewoman from his attentions. I must wish you good-day, gentlemen, with my apologies for taking up your valuable time. Kindly see that yonder draft is placed to my credit. I think,' with a withering smile, 'I stand well on your books already.'

'Yes, indeed, sir, and we are obliged to you for your custom.'

This was said by the junior partner, who had opened the door to let Mr Royston pass out.

'What is he driving at?'

'There is something behind. I don't like that sly manner of Peter Royston's,' the Quaker said; 'and I don't see that we have any call to send away a good, deserving young man to satisfy some whim of his.'

'Mr Royston's account is one of our safest and best,' the elder partner said drily. 'It won't

serve our purpose to offend him. He expected us to do as he wished at once.'

'Then he was much mistaken. I have no notion of cringing to him and eating humble pie. If my word is worth anything, I say take no heed of this request.'

'Perhaps he is making love himself to the persecuted young gentlewoman,' the loud-voiced, jolly member of the firm said, with a hearty laugh.

'I should be sorry for her, and besides, it is out of the reckoning altogether. Royston is sixty-five if he is a day—but there are other matters pressing; we must dismiss this for the present.'

'I remember,' said the elder partner, taking a pinch of snuff from his handsome silver box—'I remember the pretty sister of Royston's—his half-sister, I believe. She married Sandford when but a girl, and her family—this man and her stepmother—cut her in a cruel fashion. Yes, I remember it now; and when young Sandford came here, bearing a note from Peter Royston, I told him this. Such a letter of introduction it was! We took him into our em-

ploy on his own merits, and not from the introduction he brought along with him.'

The other partners were already occupied with important business letters, but the elder, who had indulged in these reminiscences of Philip's first appearance in the bank, tingled the bell for the head clerk. He pushed the draft towards him, as he stood by the table, and said,—

'Sandford is a well-conducted youth, eh, Parker?'

'Yes, sir. I wish more were like him.'

'Ah, outside the bank, as well as inside, you mean.'

'Yes, sir; I believe he is taken up with music; but there's naught to be said against that, sir. I play the flute myself.'

This remark elicited another hearty laugh from the jocund partner.

'I tell you what, Parker, you've not got too much breath in that lean body of yours, and I think you had best give up blowing into your flute. I heard you t'other night when I was sleeping in the bank house, after a dinner at St Andrew's Hall.'

'I beg your pardon, sir, I am sure, if I disturbed you, sir. But when it comes to my turn to sleep at the office, I find my flute a companion.'

'You didn't disturb me, Parker. I had drunk a bottle of sound port, and soon got into the land of nod. You'd be the better for some of the same liquor, eh? I'll order half-a-dozen for you, and next time you are on guard, may be you'll find it a better solace than your flute.'

'Really,' the Quaker interposed, 'this is a sad interruption to our deliberation. I must beg thee to give thy attention.'

'Quite so, quite so, I am all attention,' and the jolly gentleman, who always had a joke ready, bent his portly figure over the table and gave his opinion as to the expediency of allowing a further overdraft to a neighbouring peer, who was in perpetually-recurring pecuniary difficulties, and had written an urgent entreaty that day for leave to claim still further the forbearance of the worthy bankers.

Mr Royston's visit and his remarks about

his nephew were soon forgotten in the press of business, and Philip Sandford, all unconscious of the plot which his uncle was hatching, went at the dinner hour for a run round the Castle Hill.

He looked down on Castle Meadow and felt that he must take his courage in his hand and present himself to Hyacinth's father before many days passed. The walk that they had together on Sunday, and Hyacinth's evident distress, had haunted him ever since. Yet he thought, as he leaned against the iron railings and saw the city on this side stretched out at his feet,—

'What have I to offer her? What right have I to be her suitor? If I rise in the bank, it can be by very slow steps; and that uncle of mine—by name, not by any tie of blood or affection—is rolling in wealth. But the notion of his daring to think he could win her is too absurd. She will never sell herself to him for gold, yet this constant persecution will wear her out. To see her tears was more than I could bear; she is not like women who cry at the least pro-

vocation. She is always sunny and bright, and has rallied me many a time for my grave face, and what she called looking at the darkest side of things.'

And as he came to this part in his meditation, Hyacinth herself stood at his side. She was all smiles and happiness to-day; the fresh air of the Castle Hill had flushed her cheeks with the brightest rose, and had blown back the large beaver bonnet, so that the curls of her chestnut hair, with its strands of gold, were displayed.

'There is always a wind here,' she exclaimed; 'let us walk round if you have time.'

'Time! Yes, it is scarcely one o'clock.'

'Oh,' she said, 'I feel full of hope to-day; I am sorry I was so foolish on Sunday. Now it is you who are looking doleful.'

'How can I help it?' he said.

'But you *must* help it; and the old ogre has not been near us for three days. I hope he is affronted, for I sent back his bracelet by old Sumpter and wrote on the cover, "returned with thanks."'

'It would make him furious; he is a man who would be an implacable enemy, if an unfortunate suitor.'

'Well, what of that? The only thing that troubles me is that I cannot understand about my father. The ogre has some hold on him, and I am afraid it's about money, but I don't know.'

'And you think you are to be made a scape-goat of? Curse them both if that is their plot.'

'But I am not to be made their scape-goat,' she said brightly. 'I have a will of my own, and I will never marry any man I do not love, far—far less that old, dressed-up fop. Oh, I could laugh when I see him in my mind ambling after me up the stairs, trying to be young, and falling on his knees, ready to screech or *shawm*, as Bridget says.'

They had come to the iron gate of the steep road which led up to the Castle Hill.

'I must go now; good-bye,' she said.

'Let me walk to your house with you.'

She hesitated a moment, and then said,—

'Yes, come; why should I be ashamed to walk with you in the sight of all the world? I am not ashamed.' Then, in a lower voice, 'I am proud.'

'Heaven bless you for these words!' Philip said. 'It is I who am proud.'

'Ah! here comes Mrs Lulham; we have to thank her for her singing-class or we should never have known each other—not as well as we do, should we?'

Mrs Lulham was so busily talking to Mr Mulley that she did not at first see Hyacinth and her companion.

Little Will Crotch and his marvellous performances were the universal subject of conversation in the musical world of Norwich. There could be no doubt now of this; he was a prodigy; the most sceptical had been forced to allow it.

Mrs Lulham smiled with a somewhat provoking look on her face as she greeted Hyacinth, while Mr Mulley said,—

'We were speaking of little Will Crotch, the carpenter's boy—baby, I ought to say. I hope, madam, you will take an early opportunity of judging of his performance for yourself, and you also, sir, both musicians as you are.'

'When may I go to Mr Crotch's house?' Hyacinth asked.

'There is a performance to-morrow. The child's parents will not allow him to play to an audience every day, and wisely, too. It exhausts him too much.'

'Well, then, to-morrow I will come,' Hyacinth said; 'I will call at your house, Mrs Lulham, if you will permit me, and you will introduce me.'

'And you also sir, I hope,' Mrs Lulham said.

Philip bowed but said stiffly,—

'You are very good, madam.'

He did not like Mrs Lulham, and had seen the look she exchanged with Mr Mulley.

'I shall be engaged at that hour to-morrow in the bank,' he added.

'Now, I can't believe, sir, any engagement could keep you away when Miss Woodrow's company is in the question. I have seen this in the distance for some time, and I am vastly glad that it is now in the present. I do dearly like to see young people happy. Don't you, Mr Mulley?'

Philip Sandford was moving away and showed no sign of enjoying Mrs Lulham's pleasantry.

She was one of those women who delight in a love story, or rather a 'love gossip.' She had rallied Hyacinth several times on Philip's devotion, and had thrown out hints about other admirers who were aspiring to her favour.

Hyacinth hastened to rejoin Philip, saying,—

'Good day, Mrs Lulham, I will come to your house to-morrow at two o'clock.'

'And bring Mr Sandford along with you; he can't refuse if *you* ask him.'

'What an impertinent woman that is!' Philip said, as Hyacinth tripped along by his side. 'What business has she to chatter about your concerns? I abhor such vulgar gossip.'

'Poor Mrs Lulham,' Hyacinth said, 'she does not mean amiss, and you know we were very glad to go to her singing lessons. Besides, some girls like to have it supposed they have suitors.'

'But you are not like these girls, Heaven forbid!' Philip said, his tone changing. 'Am I very cross-grained? If I am I beg your pardon; but delightful as it is to know you are mine, I hate a woman like Mrs Lulham to dare to chatter about it.'

Philip would have been still more irate with Mrs Lulham if he could have heard what followed when she pursued her way with Mr Mulley to a school in Surrey Street, where they had pupils for singing and the piano.

'It's a poor match for her, such a pretty, lively creature as she is,' Mrs Lulham continued. 'Have you heard that the old uncle, Mr Royston, is his rival?'

'No,' Mr Mulley said. 'Sure you cannot mean Mr Royston?'

'But I do mean Mr Royston. I have it on good authority that old Woodrow is trying to concoct a match between them. And that there is some money matter in it—some old score that Mr Woodrow can't pay off, or says he can't—for I have good authority also for saying the old man is not so poor as he pretends to be.'

Mrs Lulham had always 'good authority' for her statements. Most gossips have—or think they have—which comes to the same thing!

Hyacinth was late for the early dinner, as

she had been late for the tea on that memorable evening when Mr Royston had pressed his suit.

'Keeping me waiting till I've not any appetite left, and the dinner spoiling.'

'I am only five minutes late, father. I have been on the Castle Hill for a blow; it is a lovely day, it would freshen you up to go out.'

Mr Woodrow muttered some inarticulate words, and Hyacinth, throwing aside her bonnet, sat down to the table in her pelisse.

Sumpter lifted the cover from the scrag end of boiled mutton with an air which would have been worthy of a haunch of venison or some *recherché* dish on which a chef had spent his utmost skill. Hard Norfolk dumplings, which were eaten with vinegar and sugar, were the second course, and then a plate of biscuits, known as hollow biscuits, was put on the green baize cloth, when Sumpter had removed the white one, with a decanter of dark brown sherry, and wine glasses with thick edges and a small pattern running over them.

Hyacinth saw a storm was brewing, and she did her best to talk and amuse him.

'I had a letter from my godmother to-day, father; she wishes me to go to Sheringham if you can spare me.'

'What do you want to gad about for? You'll have to stay at home and get ready for your wedding.'

'I have no wedding to get ready for yet.'

'Don't be an idiot, Hyacinth; it's not every girl has an offer like yours—you, without a penny-piece to bless yourself with, and a chariot and horses and a fine house and grounds waiting for you.'

'Father! do not tell me of these things, they are no sort of temptation to me. Once for all, I will *not* consent to marry Mr Royston, for two good reasons—first, because I loathe him, I detest him; second, because I love another man, and never, never, shall marry any one beside him.'

Mr Woodrow's face was livid with rage, and with a desperate effort he said with forced calmness,—

'Pray, miss, may I inquire who is this happy swain of whom you speak with no maidenly reserve.'

Hyacinth's voice equalled her father's in calmness, but there was a ring of triumph in the tone as she said,—

'He is Philip Sandford, the half-nephew of Mr Royston; surely, sir, that is something in his favour in your eyes!'

'Very good. If that is your whim, the sooner you leave this house the better. I'll not have my best friend insulted by you. I'll give you a week to think over it, and if you don't come to a better and more dutiful mind you may get along to your godmother; but I tell you, miss, you'll never show your face here again. I have done with you.'

Hyacinth stood looking down on her father's white face, convulsed with passion, and deep pity stirred in her heart. The impotent rage of an old man is always terrible to witness, but pathetic as well as terrible.

'Hearken, father,' Hyacinth said, in an appealing voice, 'I will not marry another man without

your consent. Indeed, there is no question of marriage yet. Philip is poor—'

'Don't name the rascal! Has not his uncle denounced him as a poor, mean-spirited fool, who gives himself airs, as all fools do, and prates rubbish about music, and goes sneaking to curry favour with fiddlers and organ-grinders instead of minding his business. He'll never get butter to his bread; he'll eat it dry to the end of his life.'

'Then, if it comes to that, I will eat it dry with him; but it won't come to that. Ask the head partner in the bank about him; ask Mr Parker, the head clerk; ask—'

'Ask the devil,' was the angry reply. 'No more of this, Hyacinth. You know my mind, so let us have no shilly-shallying. You will please give Mr Royston a proper answer by this day week or leave this house and let me see the last of you.'

'Ah! father,' Hyacinth said, 'what would my mother say if she heard you now? Bridget says she loved you, and married you because she loved you. What would she say? She had a hard life, so many sorrows, losing all her children till—till I

came; and then she died and left me to you to care for and protect. And you would force me to marry an old man, whose life has not been respectable, who has— I can't speak of what I have heard of Mr Royston. It would soil my lips to do so. You cannot, you would not have me sell myself to such a man.'

'Sell yourself! What do you mean?'

'I mean,' Hyacinth said bravely, though her voice trembled with emotion, 'I mean there must be some hidden reason which makes you, my *father*, willing, nay, anxious to see me made miserable for life.'

Mr Woodrow was at last silent. He seemed to have no power to combat Hyacinth's assertions. Contradict them he could not, and he allowed his daughter to leave the room without another word.

There *was* an old story of a disgraceful money transaction, in which he had defrauded the man, who for years had been continually holding the threat of exposure over his head.

A few months ago he had cast his eyes on

Hyacinth, and if such an unworthy sentiment as his could be called love, he fancied he loved her. It was only of late that he had noticed her, for in her earlier girlhood she had not developed the charm of her womanhood.

It was not till she was eighteen that Mrs Bosanquet, the godmother of whom she spoke to her father, had taken her dress under her care and made her cast aside the ordinary brown linsey gowns and unbecoming caps and bonnets which had been Bridget's taste, and had in some measure hidden her beauty from unobserving eyes. Hyacinth was always fair to look upon when, in her unfashionable garments, she walked to and from the ladies' seminary in Surrey Street; but her beauty was not full-blown till she grew out of the angularity of girlhood, and had the accessories of well-chosen and well-fitting gowns appropriate for day and evening wear selected by her godmother.

It is impossible to say why Mr Royston was, at his mature, not to say advanced, age so bent upon having a wife. He always posed for younger than his years, and he felt it would be

a certain triumph to show his neighbours and acquaintances that he was young enough, at any rate, to secure a young and beautiful wife.

There had been of late another motive for his persistence. When he heard it rumoured that his half-nephew was Hyacinth's favoured suitor, he was the more determined to possess her himself.

His half-sister had offended him by what he was pleased to call a *mésalliance*, and he thought he had done all that could be expected of him when he took the boy from the grammar school at sixteen and obtained a place for him in the bank, from which he was now plotting to get him dismissed, on the pretext that it was the young man's welfare that he had in view.

Philip Sandford very rarely crossed the threshold of his uncle's mansion, and he had never shown him anything but the barest civility, and now to hear that he was an obstacle in his way, that he had dared to aspire to the hand of the woman he had honoured with his choice, was gall and bitterness to him.

His visit to the bank parlour had not been

as successful as he hoped; but he said, as he settled himself in his yellow chariot and drove to his house at Lakenham, then a retired country village, now a suburb of the city,—

'I must work the oracle. I must try again. They won't care to affront me, these worthy bankers. They know the value of an account like mine, with five figures at the top of their ledger on the right side,' and he chuckled over the thought as he took a pinch from his gorgeous snuff-box, and felt what a power wealth had over poverty.

Philip Sandford was entirely ignorant of what had been the nature of his uncle's visit to the bank parlour, but he sat that evening in his solitary lodgings in Queen Street thinking over his walk on the Castle Hill with Hyacinth, and bracing himself for the interview with her father, which, he felt, he was cowardly to put off.

The violin, his constant companion and friend, lay unheeded by his side. It had often given a voice to his inmost feelings, and many a time he had by its magic power called up visions of Hyacinth, and told him of a blissful time when

he should be able to offer her a home. But to-night he was brought down from visions and dreams to the hard realities of his position.

What right had he to win Hyacinth's love when he had nothing to offer her? Although she held herself above all mercenary motives, yet she might not have counted the cost of casting in her lot with him. Other suitors besides his old uncle would probably soon be in the field, for to a lover the charms of his mistress are so great that he expects all the world to look at her with his eyes.

And, indeed, Hyacinth was already known and spoken of as the lovely daughter of old Woodrow, and it was a matter of surprise that so fair a flower could blossom from such a withered and uncomely stock.

The portrait of her mother might explain this to any who were privileged to look upon it, but they were not many. Mr Woodrow's manners were not inviting, and few of his neighbours cared to have any intercourse with him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE 'MENUET DE LA COUR'

THE number of visitors to Mr Crotch's house increased every time the child was allowed by his parents to perform.

His moods were varied, and sometimes it happened that he persisted in lying on the floor drawing with a bit of black chalk rather than play on the harpsichord or organ.

His drawing was almost as extraordinary as his musical gift, and on this occasion, when Hyacinth and Philip Woodrow were amongst the audience, little Will was in one of his most contrary moods. He looked up from his drawing with a roguish twinkle in his eyes, heedless of his mother's entreaties, and went on making rough but wonderfully accurate representations of a violin.

It is no easy matter to draw the curves of the two sides in right proportions, but this little Will did accurately.

Having exhausted all her powers of persuasion, threats and promises of any amount of comfits and toffy if he would only play, Mrs Crotch was about to give up in despair, when Mrs Lulham and Bell came into the room.

The instant the child saw Bell, he flung away his chalk, scrambled to his feet, and climbed on the music-stool, first putting his arms round Bell, and saying,—

'Dance, dance!'

Then he struck up the 'Menuet de la Cour,' and played it with precision and in time, frowning at Bell, and repeating,—

'Dance, dance!'

Mrs Crotch was so relieved to find that the audience would not have to go away disappointed that she said to Bell,—

'Take off your cloak and bonnet, my dear, and, if aunt will allow you, do the steps in the minuet.'

Bell had danced to Will's music before, when

there were no spectators, but to dance before company was a very different thing. Her cheeks flushed a bright rose colour, and, divested of her cloak and big bonnet, she stood hesitating in the space left between the audience and the harpsichord. But the minuet was played with more and more decision, and Will, looking over his shoulder, cried,—

'Dance, Bell, dance!'

The attention of the expectant visitors was now diverted from the performer on the harpsichord to the child who went through the steps of the minuet with native grace, her fair, round arms keeping time with the music, her small feet, in spite of the thick shoes, fastened by an ankle strap, keeping the pace and time perfectly.

Mrs Lulham was not very observing when Bell was concerned. She looked upon her as a child taken to her home, but scarcely to her heart, out of charity, and some faint memory of early days when her brother and herself were playmates on the Castle Hill.

If Mrs Lulham had been a keen observer, she would have seen that the vivid rose colour faded

from Bell's cheeks, that her breath came thick and fast, and, after some ten minutes' performance, she swayed forward, her face ashen white, and would have fallen to the ground had not Hyacinth caught her in her arms.

'She is swooning. Get water; it has been too much for her.'

'Why, Bell,' her aunt said, 'what a fuss to make before all the company! I am sure, Miss Woodrow, you are very kind. Bell! Bell!'

This time there was a note of alarm in the voice.

'Let me carry her to the air, and will no one get some water?'

Hyacinth tottered with her burden to the door, crossed the passage to the small room on the other side, and laid Bell down on two chairs, supporting her head on her shoulder.

Philip Sandford had fetched the water, and sprinkled Bell's forehead, so that the crystal drops clung to the soft curls, and trickled down the child's pale cheeks like rain. Presently, with a sigh, Bell opened her eyes, and, looking up at the face leaning over her, smiled, and said in a bewildered voice,—

'Where am I?'

'Where are you, indeed!' her aunt exclaimed. 'This young lady has carried you here. Come, sit up now. I am sorry, Miss Woodrow, the child should have been so troublesome. I never thought she would have gone off like that. It's very unfortunate!'

'I—I couldn't help it, aunt! The room went round, and—'

'Help it! No, poor child! the dance was too much for you; it was thoughtless of us to let you go on!'

'I must go back!' Bell said, struggling to her feet. 'Willy will be vexed. He won't play to the company.'

'You need not have fears on that score. The child has already begun other airs and has forgotten the minuet. His mother has carried him to the organ.'

Bell listened and heard the strains of the Easter hymn booming out, and then one of those medleys of various airs followed, which excited the applause of the company more than the minuet had done.

Suddenly the music stopped, and a shrill voice was heard crying,—

'Bell! Bell!'

'I must go to him,' the child said; then, pausing, she turned to Hyacinth. 'May I kiss you!' she asked.

'As often as you like, my dear little maiden,' was the reply.

'Don't be forward, miss,' Mrs Lulham said. 'Make a pretty curtsey to the young lady and gentleman, and beg their pardon for giving so much trouble.'

But Hyacinth held Bell close in her arms, kissing her tenderly, and the child looking up at her, said artlessly,—

'You are a beautiful lady. I shall dream of you. I have pretty dreams sometimes.'

'You must not talk such stuff and nonsense, Bell! I'm quite ashamed of you. You'll excuse her, Miss Woodrow, and you, Mr Sandford; and you won't be affronted, I hope.'

Philip laughed.

'I don't think Miss Woodrow is likely to be affronted at a compliment like that paid to

her, nor myself neither, more especially as I am of the same opinion as your little niece.'

'But, if I might venture to say so, I should think the little girl is very delicate,' Hyacinth interposed, smiling and blushing; 'and I am sure she ought not to be allowed to dance in a heated room till she swoons.'

Mrs Lulham bridled.

'I take every care of the poor orphan, miss. She owes everything to me. I wish you good-day,' and giving Bell a somewhat energetic push, Mrs Lulham dropped a curtsey, which was meant to be dignified, and left the room.

'She is a lovely child!' Hyacinth said. 'I must see her again. I long to comfort her.'

'Do you want to hear more of the prodigy?' Philip said. 'I am satisfied. They will kill the boy if they don't take heed.'

'They are applauding something now in the organ-room. Let us hear what it is,' and, at this moment, Mr Crotch came in from his work, flung down his cap, untied his apron, and seeing Hyacinth and Philip in the little room, said excitedly,—

'Have you heard him, sir? Have you heard

him? He is a wonder, and no mistake. Could you believe, sir, the child was playing about on the floor t'other day, and a note on the organ ciphered. You are a musician, sir, and know what I mean—that the note kept on sounding. I declare my eldest son was puzzled which note it was—so was I—an old organ player like me—when this babe of ours got up, and toddling to the keys, put his finger on the right note in a moment. He did, indeed; you may say it was chance—not a bit of it, for I made two more notes cipher, and he put his little finger down as pat as possible, and,' Mr Crotch said, getting more excited as he went on, 'Little Will can play his bass extempore to any of the airs he catches up. Dr Burney was here t'other day, and was dumbfounded when he heard my child transposing the 'Menuet de la Cour' from the Key of A to Key of B. He could scarcely believe his ears, and bade Will try C. He did it, sir, and went through all the keys of the octave, and asked the Doctor, with a roguish twinkle in his eye, what key he was playing in. The Doctor answered twice wrong, on purpose, and the little rascal

chuckled with triumph as he set him right. At last he played the tune in the key of F sharp, and fairly puzzled the Doctor. This is true as Gospel, sir, and Dr Burney is coming again, and is to bring the young genius Master Wesley to hear the child. I hope he'll not be in a contrary mood when young Wesley comes. He is sometimes, and won't play a note when we want him, the little rascal!'

'He was in one of these moods, Mr Crotch, when we first arrived this afternoon, and it was only a little girl's entreaties that made him give up drawing. A very pretty little maiden she is,' Philip said. 'Your little son shows he has good taste.'

'Oh, that's Bell Lulham! Ah, poor little soul, she has but a dull life of it, and Madam Lulham is very strict—very strict. Will you come to hear the organ, sir?'

But Philip and Hyacinth preferred a walk in the sweet, spring evening, Hyacinth saying as they left Mr Crotch's house,—

'It is pain to me to think of that baby made a show of, and then that sweet child danc-

ing till she dropped. I must find her out. She looks forlorn and uncared for, and she is so lovely.'

Philip and Hyacinth had now other matters to discuss than Baby Crotch and his wonderful performances.

'I think, sweet one,' Philip said, 'the time is come for me to see your father and declare my love for you.'

'Oh,' Hyacinth said, 'I dread it! I dread it! He has scarcely spoken a civil word to me since I sent back that old man's valentine. Put it off, Philip, put it off another week!'

'I do not like to be underhand, and, much as I love you, I would not have you the prey of idle gossip on my account. You and I are seen walking together as lovers should, and—'

'Oh! if that is it,' Hyacinth said with sudden heat 'don't walk with me again. I'll bid you good-bye now.' And before he could say another word, Hyacinth had taken a short cut to Castle Meadow —tears in her eyes, her cheeks aflame with vexation.

'He does not care for me as I care for him.

He wouldn't die of grief if I married old Royston to-morrow. Not he—men are all alike. Love is everything—yes, all the world to a woman, and just a pleasant bit of their lives to a man.'

When Hyacinth reached home, Bridget met her.

'There have been high words yonder,' jerking her head towards the parlour door. 'The old gentleman has been shut up with the master for an hour. He hasn't been gone five minutes.'

'Bridget, I shall write to Miss Bosanquet, and say I am coming by the stage as far as Cromer to-morrow. She will meet me in the gig from Sheringham.'

'You can't go to-morrow. There ain't time to send to post. Don't be so hot-headed; and you've been crying, I see.'

'I am miserable,' Hyacinth said, and she ran upstairs to the drawing-room, and tried to fling herself on the old couch, with its bowed legs and straight back, for Chippendale couches are not adapted to receive the prostrate forms of weeping maidens. Then, regardless of her bonnet or her hair, Hyacinth sank down on her knees, and, burying her face in her arms, cried and sobbed bitterly.

'I have been cross-grained to him—to Philip, my Philip. Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do? I don't care what gossips like Mrs Lulham say, nor fifty fools like her. It is thin-skinned of Philip to mind, yet it is for me he is afraid of their tongues. After all, it is love for me— But isn't it far worse to be stared at as I was at Dr Rigby's as I walked down the room with Mr Royston, and two impudent men whispered, for I heard them— Well, Bridget, what now?' Hyacinth said, starting to her feet.

'The urn is taken in, Miss Hyacinth, and you must go down to tea. Lor, what a mess your hair is in! The comb is out, and it looks like a haystack.'

'Tell my father I've a headache—it is true—and that I want to go to bed, and can't come down to tea.'

'Well, if you listen to me, which you won't, I tell you it will only rub the old master up the wrong way, and you'll repent it to-morrow. Besides,' said Bridget, 'when all is said and done, it's your own father, and blood is thicker than water, and if your blessed

mamma was alive she'd say you ought to humour your father.'

'You mean, I suppose, that my mother, yes my *mother*, would wish me to wed that old reprobate Peter Royston. I tell you, Bridget, I know she would sooner see me in my grave. Look at her now!' Hyacinth said, 'look at her! I could almost fancy she said, "Yes, far sooner."'

And Hyacinth kissed her hand to the picture, and then brushed past Bridget and went to her own room.

'What ails her now?' the old servant said. 'Her spirit is up about something. Poor child! I do feel for her, that I do; but, lor, Sumpter and me have known the master too long to think any good comes of thwarting of him. Yet it would be a shame and sin for her to marry that old man. He may be pretty respectable now, because he is got too old to care for his pleasures, but you can't wash a blackymoor white if you scrubbed for a year.'

Hyacinth bathed her hot cheek with cold water, and set up her hair again with the high

tortoiseshell comb, and then, throwing a blue scarf over her fair shoulders, she went down to tea.

The urn was hissing, and the tea which Sumpter had made was sending forth a delightful fragrance.

Tea was a dear luxury then, but it certainly was worth paying for. Two carefully-measured spoonfuls had made enough for repeated returns to the teapot, and Mr Woodrow drank cup after cup, and nibbled hot muffins, in silence—a silence Hyacinth did not care to break. It became oppressive as the tall eight-day clock ticked loudly in the corner. Now and again a cinder dropped on the hearth, and the urn gave at intervals a parting hiss. From the Castle Meadow came the distant sound of children's voices at play—a sign of lengthening days and a token of advancing spring.

Sumpter came and 'cleared away,' wearing the same imperturbable face; he dried the sheet of the *Norfolk Chronicle* which had just been sent from the office, and folding it carefully, placed it on a little table by his master's side.

Hyacinth took her tapestry frame from the

corner and settled herself before it, toying with the skeins of silk, and not really setting to work.

Although she did not know it, her father was watching her from his half-shut eyes. He did not attempt to read the paper, but leaned back in his chair, his long white hands lying on each of its arms, his cap pushed a little to one side, and displaying more of his brow than usual.

He was a wreck of what had once been a good-looking man. He had clearly-cut features, and a high if somewhat narrow forehead, and the shrunken figure under the folds of a loose coat, which answered to the dressing-gown of these times, had once been well-proportioned and above the average height.

When he had married Hyacinth's mother, the penniless daughter of a Norwich lawyer, who died without leaving any provision for his children, it was considered that the friendless girl had done well for herself.

Mr Woodrow was then an auctioneer with a fine business, and he was looked on as a prosperous man. But the love of money and desire to make much more was his ruin.

Gambling with cards had grown to a pitch in London and the provinces at the end of the last century. Mr Royston and Mr Woodrow were known to be implicated in some very dishonourable transactions, and to cover his own share in one of these, Mr Royston had paid up a large sum which cleared Mr Woodrow from the debt.

This had happened some years ago, and a general decay of physical power had stopped Mr Woodrow from carrying on his gambling to any great extent. Indeed, his agony at a run of ill-luck was so great that it brought on an attack of paralysis, which left him the mere wreck of what he had been, and the querulous and feeble invalid, to whom Hyacinth had ministered up to this time with cheerfulness, seldom retaliating when he was most aggressive and grumbling.

But now the state of affairs was changed.

The old story, which Mr Woodrow hoped had slumbered for ever, was awakened by Mr Royston finding his beautiful young daughter absolutely refused the proposal he had made her to be his wife. There had been this afternoon, as Bridget said, a very stormy time in the parlour, and it was

ended by Mr Royston leaving the discussion with these words,—

'If your fair daughter consents to give me her hand, I bury the past; if not, I shall call on you for the money I advanced to you in your difficulty, sir, and expose you as a dishonest cheat, without a spark of the honour we look for in a gentleman.'

'You dare not—you dare not,' Mr Woodrow had almost screamed in a voice choked with impotent rage. 'What about yourself, Royston—*yourself?* You won't foul your own nest, eh?'

But the door closed, and Mr Royston made no reply. Bridget, going in soon after, had found her master gasping for breath, and shaking from head to foot.

She had heard the loud voices, and she guessed what it meant, but she said nothing, got a cordial from the cupboard, and poured it down his throat.

By the time Hyacinth had come into the parlour, Mr Woodrow was in his normal condition, except that instead of greeting her with a scolding for being absent so long, he drank his tea in

silence, and now leaned back in his chair, blinking at her through half-shut eyes, and not attempting to speak.

But though he was silent, his thoughts rambled over many things in a disconnected fashion.

Hyacinth, as she sat before the tapestry frame, reminded him of her mother.

The resemblance struck the miserable old man as it had not struck him before. Out of the dim mists of the past he seemed to see his wife in her youth and loveliness, and to hear her voice raised in later years in gentle entreaty when she knew he was playing high night after night, and neglecting his business and duty in the fever of gambling.

'She has got more spirit than her mother—she'd have cut off her hand to please me—to save me; but that minx is an obstinate one—but, by George, she'll have to bend her stubborn will. She shall. I'll have no nonsense.'

He dozed a little then, and began to mutter in his sleep. Presently Hyacinth heard a name, her mother's name, twice repeated.

'Lettice—Lettice, I say.'

Hyacinth rose now from her seat, and, going to her father, said,—

'Do you want anything, sir?'

'Want—ay—I want you, my dear, to be civil to a man called Royston. You are so high and mighty to him, Letty.'

So the connection with Mr Royston went back to her mother's days! Had he always been a curse?

'But you are meek and pretty behaved, Letty. You always please your husband. Give us a kiss, and get a lot of real Stukey oysters ready for supper. Royston likes oysters. I hear the man crying 'em now. Hark!'

And this was no dream from the past—the weird melancholy of the cry rose and fell as the oyster man passed along Castle Meadow.

'*Oysters*, real *Stukey oysters*. Oys—ters, *Stukey* oys—ters.'

Norfolk people have a way of changing the sound of names of places, and thus Stiffkey, near Wells, became Stukey, and as another instance Costessey, Cossey. The past and present seemed to meet in that familiar cry of the oyster man,

and Mr Woodrow spoke more kindly to Hyacinth. Opening his eyes, he looked on her inquiringly.

'I take it I was dreaming, child, wandering in my talk, eh?'

'You were calling my mother, father.' Then she added, 'She cannot hear you where she is. If she could hear, she would bid you give up this cruel plan of yours of marrying me to an old man, who is not only old, but wicked.'

To Hyacinth's surprise, her father began to whimper and shake his head, and call her his pretty maid, and that he was a miserable old man, and no wonder she hated him.

'I don't hate you, father; you know that well enough. I am only sorry and grieved and humbled that you should be so unhappy on account of this man, Mr Royston.'

'He will ruin me. He will sell every stick and stone belonging to me.'

'Let him—let him do it. I can face ruin, but not disgrace, not the disgrace of selling myself for gold to a bad man. Now you are worn out, father; I will get Sumpter to help you to bed.'

'Wait a bit, wait a bit, child. Royston has been here this afternoon storming at me and threatening to rake up an old story against me. But he dare not do it—he dare not do it—for he will have to blacken himself also.'

'He won't do that. But any way, father, let him do his worst. Only remember I would sooner die than marry him. Oh! far, far sooner.'

Mr Woodrow seemed too much exhausted and shaken in body and mind to say more. Sumpter came and took him off to bed in an adjoining room, and Hyacinth sat down to write to Miss Bosanquet.

CHAPTER IX

BELL'S BEAUTIFUL LADY

'THE child ain't fit for school, nor for nothing else, ma'am. It's my belief she ought to have the doctor.'

'Really, Howson, I don't see anything amiss; she wants rousing,' was Mrs Lulham's reply.

'Well, I am not the one to rouse her. A young lady, who came to see her yesterday—she who caught her when she swooned at Crotch's, says the child is pining; she wants sea air.'

'And, pray, how is she to get sea air? No, Howson, you are full of fancies. I am off to give a lesson in Saint Giles', and maybe I shall meet Dr Rigby.'

Howson turned away, muttering to herself,—

'The child will slip through our fingers, and I don't know that she'd care; and maybe, if God takes her, it will be best, for she has no home, and if it's true what is said, her poor mother

was no better than she should be—poor lamb! poor lamb!'

Howson went on with her household duties, while Bell sat curled up in a chair by the kitchen fire, turning over the leaves of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was a very real story to her, and the men and women in it a living and moving crowd.

Howson had gone upstairs to her work in the upper chambers, when Bell was roused from her dream of the Palace Beautiful by a heavy tap at the door, followed by the entrance of John Crome.

He put down his basket and said,—

'How do you fare—eh? Did you fancy my valentine pictur'?'

'Oh, yes!' the child said, smiling; 'it was very funny.'

'Funny! I do not call it funny. I want you to be my valentine.'

'Very well,' was the reply. Then she added 'I liked the little weenie thimble. Thank you, John Crome.'

'Why ain't you at school?'

'I am so tired, that's why Howson won't let me go.'

'You want some physic. I've got some in my basket that will do,' and Johnnie proceeded to open the basket and take out a phial, with the label tied round the neck. 'Tonic mixtur'. That's it, look ye! I'll give you a dose, and fill up the bottle with water. The old lady will never know. Where's a mug?'

'Oh! no, no, thank you; please don't—I hate physic.'

'But this smells good; try and sniff it, it's like oranges.'

But Bell turned away her face as Johnnie held the phial to her nose.

'*Don't!* I wish you'd go away.'

Johnnie felt hurt, for Bell had of late always been present to his mental vision; her beauty attracted him, the colour of her hair, her eyes blue as the sky, her cheeks like the apple blossom in the orchards over the river.

He did not make any sign of going away. He re-corked the phial, and put it in the basket, then he stretched himself out in his favourite position, resting on his elbows, and the heels

of his heavy-nailed boots making a tattoo on the red brick floor.

Bell opened her book again and began to read.

'What are you reading of?—tell me.'

'You wouldn't care to know.'

'I should care, if you do.'

'It's about the way to Heaven—the straight, narrow way.'

John Crome made a grimace.

'That's dull reading, ain't it?'

'Dull!' Bell cried. 'Dull! Oh, no, it is told by a man who dreamed it all, and saw it all in his dreams. He saw Christian with a load on his back, and he saw him drop it by the Cross, because, you know, the load was his sins; and now I am come to the part about the Palace—the Beautiful Palace—where three lovely ladies came to talk to Christian, and all the time he was on the way to Heaven—the Golden City—where it is all beautiful, and where there is music, *such* music—and no sin—*that* is the best of all. No one is naughty or unkind, and all the angels sing God's praise.'

John Crome liked to hear her talk; he liked

to watch the colour deepen on her sweet face. What she told him made, I am afraid, but little impression, but her voice was music to him, and her face—!

He longed with unspeakable longing to paint that face, just as he longed to paint the sunset sky and the trees now in their first flush of green.

The artist soul in him was stirred to its inmost deeps. The soul, which had indeed but little affinity with the clumsy, ungainly body in which it lived—but little affinity with the curiously comic side of John Crome's character — the side which made tricks of all sorts his delight — tricks played on poor Mr Hicks, phials filled with water instead of medicine, pills rolled up which were only bread, and blisters spread with a concoction of his own on the stiff bits of leather which were then the terror of unhappy patients, who had one of them clapped on their chests or sides at the least provocation.

The tricks were generally found out, and many were the kicks and cuffs the boy received in consequence, but it was impossible to be

angry with him for long together, and Dr Rigby in his secret heart had a liking for his surgery boy, though he often called him a confounded young villain, who deserved a thrashing every day.

'Go on,' John Crome said, 'tell us some more.'

'No,' Bell said, 'you mustn't stay an longer; p'r'aps some poor folks are waiting for the physic, and you ought to be off on your errands.'

John showed no sign of attending to Bell's order to proceed with his basket of pills and potions, and his dark eyes were fixed on her face with the hungry gaze of one who was longing to make her beauty his own—not by possession as we understand the word. He would not have dared or wished to touch her little white hand with his rough one; he looked upon her as a divinity above him, yet exercising a wonderful influence over him, by awakening in him aspirations to which he could gave no name, but which uplifted him for the time from the awkward, untutored errand boy to a higher level and a clearer atmosphere.

Presently he started to his feet for Howson's heavy step was heard on the stairs at the tinkle of the bell at the front door. Then a silvery voice was heard,—

'Can I see the little girl called Bell who lives here?'

'Yes, sure,' was Howson's gruff reply. 'Yes, sure, you may see her?'

'It is my lady again, my beautiful lady,' Bell exclaimed, and without giving John Crome another thought she ran across the kitchen to the narrow passage, and found Howson standing with the door in her hand, and apparently rather doubtful about admitting Miss Woodrow.

'Ah,' Hyacinth exclaimed, 'here is my little maiden. Are you better, dear, to-day?'

Howson made a variety of gestures and grimaces, and taking the young lady into the parlour bid Bell run back to the kitchen.

'Oh, but I want to see her.'

Howson nodded, and then shutting the door and standing with her back against it, she said, the frills of the large nightcap she always

wore when about her work vibrating with excitement,—

'Yon child will go after her mother in a decline if we don't take care, and a good thing if the poor lady had done nothing worse than go off in a galloping consumption. She made a sad mess of her life, and that poor innocent is the sufferer. Bygones are bygones, but missus ain't her real aunt, and that's why she seems so hard on her.'

Hyacinth listened in bewildered astonishment, and could not conceive why Howson should, immediately on her arrival, burst forth into the child's family history.

'I am come,' she said, not knowing what rejoinder to make, 'to ask if I may have the little girl to spend the day. Since I saw her at Mrs Crotch's and she fainted, when I was so struck with her beautiful little face and winning ways, I have thought of her continually.'

'Don't let her hear you say so; them ways and pretty face were the ruin of her mother, poor thing! Miss, you'll excuse me, I know; I dessay Mrs Lulham will have no objections; she is out

teaching most days and singing most nights. The child has a dull time, for she can't go to school. Says she, "Howson, my legs do ache and I am so tired." Says I, "Then I'll keep you back from school," and I've done it. I'll call her now.'

Howson opened the door, but Bell had vanished into the kitchen again, much disappointed that Howson had banished her. But Hyacinth quickly reassured her.

In a very short time Howson bustled with her upstairs, put on her best black bombazine and cloak, hid her pretty head under a grotesque erection between a hat and a bonnet, and, bidding her be sure to mind her manners, despatched her with Miss Woodrow for the day.

Envious eyes watched the pair from the corner of the street, where John Crome was still loitering.

'She's off with my young lady who gave me the crown-piece. Lor! I wish I was going that way. But I shall catch it, it's gone twelve, and my rounds ain't half done. Wouldn't I just like to chuck this here basket into the river, but

the day will come—the day will come. I ain't a-going to be surgery boy all my life, not if I knows it. So cheer up, John Crome, and better times will come!'

Then breaking out into a loud whistle of some popular air, which had more tune than time in it, John Crome went on his way.

Hyacinth was soon conscious that the little feet encased in very thick shoes had much ado to keep up with her swift, springy steps. She took Bell's hand and bade her not hurry.

'We will go round by the Gentlemen's Walk, and perhaps we shall find a doll. Would you like a doll, Bell?'

Bell, in all her desolate, lonely childhood had never had a doll, and was a little doubtful. But when she was taken into a shop where many were displayed, she made up her mind. The wooden dolls with painted cheeks, and hair gummed on their heads, were of a superior class to that which John Crome had bought for his sister Peg, but they did not attract little Bell. She said in a low, shy voice, in answer to Hyacinth's question,—

'Please, miss, I would rather have a picture-book if you don't mind.'

Picture-books were scarcely more attractive than dolls in those days. Rough woodcuts were the only illustrations known, and a great deal was left for the imagination to fill up in the representations of 'scenes in town and country, for good children.'

'You are sure you would like a book better than a doll?' Hyacinth asked.

'Yes, please, miss.'

'Then we must go to another shop, I am afraid,' Hyacinth said to the shopwoman; 'I am very sorry to have troubled you.'

'Oh, don't mention it, Miss Woodrow; but I should say, if I might venture, that child would be better with toys than poring over books. Children are too forced on nowadays. Here's Mr and Mrs Crotch trumpeting that baby's musical doings in the most ridiculous way. I heard him one day, and I thought nothing of it. It seemed to me all noise and no tune.'

As the good woman did not know one tune

from another, her opinion was not of much value; but she only echoed the sentiments of many of the Norwich people, who did not know that the budding genius, which they were inclined to doubt, was to bring them a reflected honour in the years to come.

When Hyacinth reached home, she found her godmother, Miss Bosanquet, had arrived, and was in the drawing-room waiting for her.

'My dear child!' Miss Bosanquet exclaimed, 'I am come to take you home with me, so get your things together, and we will start at two o'clock. Whom have we here?'

Bell had followed Miss Woodrow upstairs, and now stood just inside the drawing-room door, afraid to go further, and wishing herself back with Howson.

'It is little Bell Lulham,' Hyacinth said.

'What! The child the singing mistress has taken to her home. I have heard of her, poor little girl! It is really strange that I should thus find her with you. Come here, my dear; don't be afraid.'

But Bell, overcome with the strangeness of her

position, and tired with her walk, burst into tears.

'Oh, Bell,' Hyacinth said, 'what is the matter?'

'Send her to Bridget while we talk,' Miss Bosanquet said.

Bridget was summoned, and Hyacinth said,—

'Take care of the child, Bridget, and give her some cake and cowslip wine. She is not very strong.'

'Strong!' Bridget repeated the word. 'I should think not. Lor! what a heavy cloak! it's enough to weigh the child to the ground.'

Bell went away holding fast to Bridget's hand, and then Miss Bosanquet said,—

'Now then, child, let us see what is to be done.'

'I can't—I won't marry that old man!'

'No; I would rather see you in your grave. Come home with me.'

'I must not leave my father, and—'

'And Philip Sandford—is that it? Well, I know something about him which will set you free as far as he is concerned. I have seen him this very morning. He came here with his news

—saw your father—declared his love for you—and, like a wise dog, went out before he was kicked out. I am glad I was here—yes, in the room—and I spoke my mind pretty plainly to your father. He softened a bit when I spoke of your mother—he always does. I don't choose him, so I told him, to kill you as he had killed her, and I am going to take you back to Sheringham with me.'

But Hyacinth said,—

'What is Philip's news? You spoke of news.'

'He is off by the stage to London to see a big tea merchant, a relative of the Quaker partner in the bank. They are like to offer him a very fine salary.'

'Oh!' Hyacinth said, starting up, 'this *is* news.'

'Wait a bit till you hear all. If they approve of Philip he is to go out to America with a lading of tea, and remain there to look after the interest of the firm.'

'To America!' and poor Hyacinth's face grew very pale. 'Oh! this is terrible.'

'No, no. Not a bit of it. He will make a

fortune, most likely, and then not a word can be said against your marrying him, unless either of you change your mind between this and then.'

'Change! As if I could ever change!'

'Ah, well,' and Miss Bosanquet sighed, 'I have known men change, and women too, for that matter.'

'But I must see him—I must see him. I was rather flighty to him the other day, and yet I know he was right. He didn't care for gossips to talk about me, and said so.'

'Well, he won't go beyond the seas without bidding you good-bye.'

'What induced the partners to offer this place to him?'

'Ah! that I can't tell you. I may have my suspicions, but they go for nothing.'

Hyacinth was so occupied with her own concerns that she forgot poor little Bell.

'Did you say you knew something about Bell Lulham?'

'Yes, but it's not a story to tell you—anyhow, not to-day. All you have to do is to get ready to come with me. Your father is willing. He

thinks maybe that if you are freed from that old rascal's importunities you may come round, especially as Master Sandford will be out of the way. It is lucky that he has got this situation.'

'Lucky!' Hyacinth exclaimed. 'Lucky! It is miserable; it is dreadful. Years will pass, and I shall never, never see him!'

'My dear,' Miss Bosanquet said, who was of a sanguine nature, and practical withal, 'my dear, you will meet again. He will make a fortune—come home and marry you, if, in the interval, some other suitor has not been favoured.'

'Oh, I cannot think how you can be so unkind, so unfeeling, so—'

'I don't think I am either. I was nineteen once, and had my little *affaire du cœur*, Hyacinth. Now we must be going down to dinner. I hear an irritable twang in Sumpter's hand-bell, and, by-the-bye, where is the child?'

Hyacinth felt self-reproached when little Bell, waiting at the foot of the stairs, said,—

'Please, Miss Woodrow, had I better go home?'

'No, no, dear; not till you have had your

dinner,' and Hyacinth put her arm round the child and kissed her upturned face.

'The sea air would be good for her,' Miss Bosanquet said. 'We will take her with us. Will you come, Bell?'

'No. I couldn't leave Howson.'

'Not to be with me?' Hyacinth said.

'No,' said the faithful child. 'No, thank you, miss.'

Mr Woodrow was in a curiously serene temper. He had vented his rage against Philip Sandford in the morning, when Miss Bosanquet had so suddenly and opportunely appeared. Now calm came after the storm, and satisfaction that Philip would be sent across the seas to America was so great that he forgot everything else. He was quite willing to part with his daughter to her godmother. He stood, for some occult reason, in awe of Miss Bosanquet. Perhaps he knew she was well aware of the secrets of his past life, and that she had been the devoted friend of his wife, who had died of a broken heart at Hyacinth's birth, nineteen years before.

Hyacinth was anxiously watching the passers-

by, hoping against hope that Philip would come to bid her farewell. But the time went on and he did not appear. She scarcely touched her dinner, and under the excuse of packing her box to be ready for her visit to Miss Bosanquet she left the table.

She found Bridget had made all necessary preparations, and was on her knees putting in a few last things.

'Oh, Bridget, Bridget, will Sumpter take a note for me to the bank? What shall I do if I can't bid him good-bye—good-bye for ever? I am miserable. I am in despair.'

Bridget went on silently with her preparations, closed the little portmanteau with a bang, and locked it.

'Here is the key. Now don't be shy* and lose it. You don't fare to know what you are about. I thought you'd be glad to get away from the old gentleman. He'll be looking in to-night and find you gone.'

'You don't care for me, Bridget. If you did—Hark! there's a ring at the bell.'

* The word *shy* in Norfolk is used for flighty and careless.

And Hyacinth flew downstairs to find Sumpter had opened the door and held a letter in his hand addressed to her. It was written in Philip's clear, clerkly hand on half a sheet of Bath post, folded and sealed with red wax:—

'THE BANK, *March* 1.

'I came to see Mr Woodrow to-day, and begged him to permit me to bid you farewell. He was very angry—softened a little when he heard of my banishment—and the presence of Miss Bosanquet was a check.

'I cannot fathom the reason of this move. It came on a sudden. The partners seem to think they do me a favour. It is a leap from eighty pounds per annum to one hundred and fifty. I asked for time to consider, but they said it was urgent to decide at once. Parker has some inkling of the truth, but he is a cautious man. All I can gather is, that the tea merchants in London, being in quest of a dependable man to transact their American business, applied to the relative of one of the partners to help them to find such an one.

'But why pitch on me? Yet we must not lose

sight of the fact that it is to my advantage—were it not for the heartbreak of leaving you. But, if God pleases, I may return in a position to come boldly as your suitor. As it is, I am but a cause of sorrow to you—a cause of outbreaks of temper from your father, and we could not have continued as we were.

'I say naught of that old relation of mine who has dared to ask you to look with favour on him. I know my Hyacinth better than to think she would listen for a moment to his detestable suit. But, dear heart, we will trust and not be afraid. I shall come to the coach office at two o'clock to look my last on you.

'To come to your father's house would goad him to rage against me. I write this as my farewell. I go by the night mail to London, and I am to sail from the Port of Bristol in a week's time. Farewell, my beloved—again I say farewell. And may the Lord bless and keep you —so prays your devoted lover and servant,

'P. S.'

Hyacinth's spirit rose as she read these words.

'I will leave him with a smile, and not with tears. It may be, that which looks so dark — this cloud hanging over us — has a silver lining.'

She had read the letter in the little lobby, and now Sumpter was seen bringing her box down the narrow stairs, and it was presently put on a hand-barrow and wheeled by a porter to the coach-office.

'Good-bye, father,' Hyacinth said; and looking at his thin, miserable face, her heart misgave her. 'It is at your desire that I pay my godmother a visit, father, you are sure?'

'Yes, yes, get along, and come back, like a dutiful daughter, ready to do as I desire.'

She bent over him, and kissed him again and again.

He made but a faint response, and so she left him, Miss Bosanquet saying, in her cheerful, ringing voice,—

'Good-bye, sir. I will take care of her, and send her back with roses on her cheeks.'

Mr Woodrow held out two fingers to Miss Bosanquet, and nodding his head, said,—

'Good-day to you, madam. I wish you a safe journey to Sheringham.'

'Little Bell, dear—dear little Bell!' Hyacinth said, 'Bridget will take you home. I am sorry I have given you, after all, but a poor holiday.'

'She will come to Sheringham and pick up shells on the beach. I'll see to it. I will write by to-morrow's mail to her aunt.'

But Bell was firm.

'I don't wish to leave Howson,' she said, 'and Will Crotch.'

But the last words were added in such a low voice Hyacinth did not hear them. She had kissed Bridget, and bade her take Bell home after tea, and then she walked quickly away to overtake Miss Bosanquet.

There were but few passengers by the stage to Cromer that afternoon. Miss Bosanquet and Hyacinth were late, the coachman had the reins in his hand ready to mount to the box. Philip stood waiting to get his last look and his last good-bye.

It was as well that there was time for nothing more.

Hyacinth and he clasped hands for an instant, then she sprang lightly to her place by Miss Bosanquet on the back seat of the lumbering coach. She looked down from her vantage ground at Philip's tall, slight figure standing erect with folded arms, his face pale with suppressed emotion, yet his mouth resolute and firm! In the presence of witnesses he would give no sign of the grief gnawing at his heart.

And Hyacinth, true to her resolution, smiled to the last, looking back at him as the coach rattled out of the yard, and waving her hand as he raised his hat in token of farewell. The smile died away as soon as the coach was well on its way, and Miss Bosanquet saw that Hyacinth covered her face with her hands, and that tears were falling from her lustrous eyes; but she was a woman of tact, as well as of kindness. She offered no words of commonplace consolation, but presently made a remark on the beauty of the spring afternoon, and drew her thick cloak more closely round Hyacinth, saying, though the sun was so brilliant, the wind was the true north-easter,

which strong Norfolk-born people find invigorating, though it pinches and withers the less robust with its breath.

Philip Sandford stood motionless for some minutes, till one of the waiters at the Inn asked if he could do anything for him.

He started from his reverie and said,—

'I shall be starting by the mail-coach for London to-night. Can you send a barrow for my luggage to 3 Queen Street?'

'Yes, sir, certainly. Is your place booked? Better book it, sir, so that you get a cosy corner inside, for 'twould be bitter cold riding outside passenger to-night.'

Philip went into the office and booked his seat; his salary had been paid him up to the quarter, and a sum given him for all expenses till he reached Tokenhouse Yard, where the tea merchants and wholesale grocers had their offices.

'I suppose there are many who would deem me lucky,' he thought, as he turned away, 'but what is money without love? And she is the only one in all the world who loves me. She is the sun in my heaven, and now dark clouds of dis-

tance and separation come between, and I have to fight the world alone.'

But Philip Sandford was young, and hope sprang up within him that this unexpected change might bring him to the desired end and enable him, in the future years, to claim Hyacinth for his wife. Then there was the charm of novelty in a change from a desk in the bank to a new country and a new occupation and new scenes of labour.

He had not many friends, but he bid them all a fairly cheerful good-bye.

The kind parting words of the Quaker partner did much to raise his spirits,—

'We have found thee trustworthy and industrious,' the good man said. 'Thou must take this transfer to the service of my worthy friends in London as a token of approval. I know but little of thy life outside our office, but I can honestly say, inside it has been all we could desire. I wish to add a little gift from myself to the salary and money for expenses paid thee this morning.'

A bank-note, signed by the partner himself,

according to the custom, now long since given up, was put into Philip's hands, with a warm pressure and a hearty 'Fare thee well! farewell!'

Just as Philip was leaving the bank parlour, a servant, wearing his uncle's livery, handed in a note to one of the clerks, who was finishing up his work after business hours.

'Any answer, sir?'

The worthy Quaker scanned the few lines, written on a large sheet of Bath post, and called Philip back.

'Thy uncle, hearing of thy departure, asks me to hand thee a sovereign.'

In his heart the good Quaker was ashamed to offer the paltry gift. He knew very well that Philip had but scant cause to be grateful to Mr Royston.

The colour came into Philip's face as he said,—

'May I beg you, sir, to have the goodness to return my uncle's gift, with thanks. By your kind generosity I am in no need of his alms.'

And then Philip was gone.

'Phew! so my young man's spirit is up. Well, I cannot blame him. And if I did not think this move, coming, too, as it did, unsought, was to his advantage, I would not have aided and abetted Peter Royston's scheme for an account in credit fifty times as large as his. I wonder if we shall ever come to the bottom of this request of his? I never feel sure of a man who cannot look you straight in the face.'

When Mr Royston arrived at Castle Meadow that evening, he felt triumphant. The way was cleared now, and he congratulated himself on the success of his scheme. What was his chagrin to find that the bird he had hoped to catch in his net was flown?

'Her godmother insisted on taking her away for a week — only a week,' Mr Woodrow said, trembling as he saw the livid hue of suppressed rage on Mr Royston's face. He had more reasons than Mr Woodrow knew for hating Miss Bosanquet. 'It is only for one week, sir,' the wretched old father pleaded—'only for a week. When she returns she will be dutiful, and do as I desire. I pray you not to be embittered against me nor

against her, poor child! Her godmother is a woman of a strong will, and it is vain to combat it. She will have her way.

'And I will have *mine!*' Mr Royston said. 'Confound Miss Bosanquet!'

CHAPTER X

A LIFE-STUDY

JOHN CROME was very much disappointed that Mrs Lulham wanted no physic. He felt an irresistible attraction to her house—to look at Bell, and study her as he studied pictures in the shop windows; but he took many a scamper on his own account in the direction of Mrs Lulham's house, and would put his head in at the kitchen in the hope of seeing Bell in the ruddy firelight.

Howson did her best to discourage him, and on the third day after Bell's expedition to Castle Meadow with Hyacinth, she greeted John Crome with,—

'It's no use your hanging about here; go about your business. I am getting the child ready to go to Cromer, to a kind lady there.'

'Where is she now? Where's Bell now?'

'Where you won't be welcomed,' said Howson, shortly. 'Lor! I wonder the doctor keeps such an idle Jackanapes as you are!'

John Crome made a grimace, but did not take up his basket.

'Tell me where the child is. Come! is she at Crotch's, eh?'

'You go along, and don't be impudent.'

'I'll go and find out, for all you say.'

He was off now, and was soon at Mr Crotch's house.

The door was open and he crept in unobserved.

At the door of the organ-room he heard Mrs Crotch's voice pleading with her wayward child,—

'After all the trouble the gentlemen have taken, Will, to think you won't play. Oh! Will, Will!'

Master Will was in one of his most contrary moods just when he was wanted to be especially complacent, for Dr Burney had brought young Wesley to hear his wonderful performance.

Mrs Crotch had evidently a taste of the trouble

as well as the glory of being the mother of a genius.

'Hark to the lovely tune the young gentleman is playing. Do play it, Will.'

It was a simple melody in the minor which he had written at Dr Burney's wish, to see if the wonderful child could transpose it through all the minor keys. But Will was obdurate, though Bell did her utmost, as well as his mother, to persuade him.

John Crome's eyes were fastened on Bell. Her distress that Will should so disappoint his father and mother gave an added and pathetic charm to her face.

Presently she went to young Wesley, as Dr Burney, growing impatient, said he could not wait any longer, and whispered,—

'If you play the treble, and tell Will he *can't* play the bass, I think he will do it.'

The ruse was successful.

Master Wesley, at a hint from Dr Burney, played the air for the fourth time, and turning round sharply on the child, said,—

'There, my little man, that's the tune, now I know you can't play the bass to it.'

In an instant the child clambered up to the bench before the organ and accompanied the air with the correct bass as he sat by Wesley's side.

Then followed transpositions into all the minor keys, one after another, until Wesley, turning to Dr Burney, said,—

'You are right, sir, you are right; more will be heard of little master in the future.'

'Take him to London, madam,' Dr Burney said, turning to Mrs Crotch. 'I'll see he gets a hearing and that you get money for your pains.'

This was to be the last of Bell's visits to the Crotches for some time.

Mrs Lulham had been only too glad to accept Miss Bosanquet's offer and Bell was to be despatched the next day in the Cromer coach.

John Crome hung about till she came out of the Crotches' house.

The distance was short, and Bell was always trusted to go along the street by herself.

She was trudging demurely along the pavement, her heart sore with parting with Will, who had scarcely turned from his playing to return her kiss, when Crome came alongside of her.

He swung his basket backwards and forwards, and tried to whistle carelessly, for he was mortified that Bell did not notice him.

'I say,' he began, 'have you done reading that book?'

'Oh! Johnnie Crome, is that you?

'Yes, 'tis me,' was the answer; 'tell us about the book. I like to hear about the Palace Beautiful.'

'There were more beautiful things than that,' Bell said. 'The Golden City came last, only there was the dark river to cross first. Christian was afraid, and thought he was sinking.'

'Couldn't he swim?' Johnnie said.

'I don't think so—I am not sure. The dark river means death. Christian had to die before he got there.'

'I daresay there was another way round,' John Crome said.

'No,' Bell said, 'no; you see it was a straight, narrow way all along, and nobody could turn out of it. I often wish,' the child said, with a sigh, 'that I could set out and find the way to the Heavenly City.'

'Let's come along and try,' John Crome said, 'you and I.'

Bell smiled sadly and shook her head.

'It was only a dream,' she said; 'it was only a dream; but sometimes I fancy it—the city, I mean—must be like that,' pointing to the golden sunset sky of the spring evening.

'*That's* lovely.'

There was something tangible now for John Crome to take hold of. He stood looking at the sky and Bell's little figure with the light upon it, her face upturned, from which the big bonnet had fallen back.

Both children stood for a few minutes by the door of Mrs Lulham's house; on the boy's face the shining of genius, on the girl's, 'the light which never is on land and sea.'

Without a word they parted. John Crome swung his empty basket over his shoulder, and scampered off, to receive Mr Hicks's cuff for loitering in the streets instead of coming home when his errands were done. The transient emotion passed away, and he was once more the doctor's errand boy, full of pranks and mischief, unable to resist,

late as he was, a game of leap-frog as he went through Davey Place.

Little Bell went to tell Howson about Will Crotch, and how he had been so determined not to play to the young gentleman who had come on purpose to hear him.

Howson looked up from her ironing board, where she was busy clear-starching some neckerchiefs for her mistress and two linen ones for Bell.

'I hope his mother whipped him well, and gave him dry bread for supper. The notion of a brat like him setting himself up in that manner. I have no patience with him. Now, you must go to bed early, for you've a pretty long journey to-morrow,' and Howson sighed. 'I wish you weren't going,' she said.

For the last day or two she had continually told Bell it would be the best thing in the world for her to have a breath of sea air, and she knew that good Miss Bosanquet would give her new milk from the cow, and plenty of nourishing food.

But Howson, having delivered herself of her real feelings as if by accident, took up the other

strain, and as she ironed and pinched the lace border of her mistress's neckerchiefs and the frills of her nightcaps, continued to dilate on the wonders of the seashore—the *agutes* and the *'nelians*, and the little pink shells, and the big white ones which Bell would pick up and bring back to her as keepsakes.

Mrs Lulham was engaged for the next day to give lessons at Catton, so she left Howson to manage about Bell's departure. She gave Howson the money for the fare, and a shilling for Bell to put in her pocket, and bestowed on her a somewhat perfunctory kiss, telling her to be a good girl and mind how she behaved, for Miss Bosanguet was a very genteel lady and very particular as to manners, and that her house was full of beautiful things, and Bell must be sure never to go into the parlour with wet feet from the sands.

As Bell trotted by Howson's side to the coach office, she wished she was setting out on the narrow way through the wicket gate to the Heavenly City. Her head was full of that wonderful story which has been a reality to many besides little Bell.

She held Howson's hand tightly in hers, and presently said,—

'Wouldn't it be nice if you and I were starting together to the wicket gate, and found the right way?'

Howson gave an indefinite answer aloud, but in her heart she thought,—

'The child is not long for this world. I've been to blame to let her sit poring over that book; it breaks my heart to think of her, poor lamb!—one of those children who ought never to have been born, and who nobody wants, except, may be, myself. And who am I? She's as lovely as an angel, and if God takes her to live with Him, I, for one, shall say it is just the best thing.'

Poor little Bell did not feel at all as if she were going on pilgrimage to the Heavenly City when she was shut up in the stuffy coach with straw at the bottom, and tiny square windows, which an asthmatic old lady insisted on keeping close shut.

Howson stood till the coach rattled off, waving her hand and making a ghastly attempt

at a smile, and Bell dashed away her tears to try to return it, and so they parted.

Miss Bosanquet was waiting at Cromer for the arrival of the mail-coach in an old-fashioned vehicle known then as a double gig, and Bell was received with,—

'Here you are, child; now you must make haste and get roses in your pale cheeks.'

Miss Bosanquet did everything in a quick fashion. She was thoroughly practical and decided, the Lady Bountiful of Sheringham, which was then only a village nestling in a dip of the Beeston Hills, which were a glory of gorse in May, and were even now showing gleams of gold amongst their prickly bushes.

The cottage was a low, rambling house, with many nooks and corners. To the uninitiated there were constant traps of two steps up and three down in the passages, and a general unevenness of the floors in the bed chambers, which were all with dormer windows under the gabled roof. The cottage was a thoroughly cosy, comfortable house, and the mistress was known to be hospitable, so that it was a

favourite resort for her friends who longed for rest and freedom from social requirements, for Miss Bosanquet had the happy gift of leaving her guests to amuse themselves, and did not follow them about with the punctilious ceremony which a hundred years ago was thought the duty of a hostess.

Tall and erect, with the air and bearing of a true gentlewoman, Miss Bosanquet was in advance of her time, when independence and freedom of action were looked upon as extraordinary and even reprehensible by the soft-spoken, mincing ladies who could faint at the least provocation, and go into hysterics at the sight of a harmless mouse or a caterpillar. If Miss Bosanquet was intolerant of affectations and carried bluntness of speech sometimes beyond the pale of courtesy, she had a womanly heart, and was true to her friends and loyal to their interests.

It would have been impossible for Hyacinth to have been in a more wholesome atmosphere than that which pervaded the Cottage, and Miss Bosanquet set her to work on garments for the

pear, and comforts for the consignment men, then shown as preventive men, whose calling exposed them to all weathers when in the outlook for smugglers.

'It is useless to remind a man regrets, my dear,' Miss Bessamore said to her. 'The best cure for heart-ache is sea air, and exercise out of doors and work within. I will provide you with plenty, but I will have no moaning over the inevitable.'

When Jael arrived, Miss Bessamore gave her over to Hyacinth's charge, and Jael was well content to sun herself in the presence of her beautiful lady, and was always happy to be with her.

So the spring days passed, and Hyacinth began to forget the existence of Mr Royston, and to hope that he had at last discovered that his suit was hopeless.

'How long ought I to stay here?' Hyacinth asked one morning, a week after her arrival.

'As to *ought*, I can't say, but you won't wear out your welcome.'

'I mean about father: he may want me, and all this dreadful trouble about Mr Royston we did

not disagree, and he was kind to me. I think that old man has quite given me up now.'

'I am not so sure, my dear. I never heard of his giving up any game he set his heart on.'

'Do you know much about him?'

'More than I like,' was the reply—'of his past life.'

'Does he think you know?'

'I can't say, but I suspect he must. I may tell you this much, that twelve or fourteen years ago he wrought ruin in the house of a respectable land-agent at Yarmouth. The man transacted some business for me, and I respected him. He had a pretty, weak-minded wife, who, poor foolish thing! fell into the trap that old villain laid for her. She left her husband and disappeared. This man was the cause of her ruin. She died miserably, and before the end, being deserted, with her child, by her betrayer, she prayed her husband to forgive her and take the child. He went to see her on her deathbed, and the child was given to his sister to bring up. He could not, poor man! endure the sight of her. So the innocent suffered for the guilty. She is dead now, and the whole

story is forgotten. Of course Royston is a liar, and utterly refused to acknowledge the child. I have never been face to face with him, *but*, if he continues to persecute you, I shall confront him.'

'How dreadful it is to think of such wickedness! Is the child alive?'

Miss Bosanquet was silent.

'I'll finish the story another day. Now, there is the pony chaise, and I must take little Bell down to the shore.'

'She doesn't get stronger, does she? And she talks so much about the Heavenly City, and wishes she could get there.'

'Ah! poor little maid! She wants to be roused and made to play like other children.

'Isn't it odd,' Hyacinth said, 'when I asked her how old she was, she said, "I don't know; I never had a birthday?" I think she pines for little Will Crotch, happy as she is to be here. Have you ever heard him play the organ?'

'No; and I don't wish to hear him. They'll addle the child's brain if they don't take care. Dr Rigby told me he thought it a great risk to show off that babe's performances as they do,

exciting him up to fever pitch; and when he is not playing on one of the instruments he is fretful and naughty.'

'No one can hinder the child from playing. Music comes to him as naturally as sunshine and air.'

'Ah! well-a-day!' Miss Bosanquet said, 'I would sooner have a commonplace child than a genius.'

Miss Bosanquet drove off in the little, low pony chaise with Bell by her side. Bell's feet rested on a large basket filled with dainties for a sick woman, the wife of one of the coastguard.

Hyacinth rather enjoyed being left to herself, and to think undisturbed of Philip. She had heard nothing since they parted, but she knew he must have sailed from Bristol by this time, and she looked over the wide expanse of the German Ocean with a tender feeling that while he was on the sea she could picture his surroundings of sky and moving waters, while no imagination could show her the strange country when he had once set his foot on the shores of that distant world.

A voyage to America in the eighteenth century was, at the best, long and tedious, its length depending on favourable or unfavourable weather, storm or calm.

A departure to America is now a very ordinary occurrence. People go and come on pleasure or business in the spacious steamers, which are like moving hotels, with the ease and speed which would have seemed, if it had been prophesied in Hyacinth Woodrow's time, like the phantom of some improbable fairy tale.

Good-byes are said with the hope of speedy meeting, and, with weekly letters and telegrams if anything especial has to be communicated, separation cannot have the almost hopeless pain which Hyacinth felt when she thought of the long, long years before she should see Philip again.

She must not be judged by the standard of to-day, and her love scoffed at as sentimental and foolish by the stronger-minded maidens of our time. Perhaps a little more of the old romance would not be amiss in our modern love stories, and a little less of the new doctrine that we

sometimes hear preached by the fair daughters of the closing century, that they have something else to occupy them than thinking of marriage, and that when they do think about it, it will be as a matter of business, and the securing of a home when journalism, type-writing and essays of wisdom on men and things have failed to win any great meed of success.

CHAPTER XI

DEFEATED

HYACINTH put on her pelisse and bonnet soon after Miss Bosanquet had driven off with Bell.

She turned out of the grounds behind the cottage to the hill, and went to a familiar spot whence she could have a view of the far-stretching sea, rippling to-day in the sunshine, and covered with tiny, crested waves, over which snowy gulls were sweeping in flocks, and now and again uttering the melancholy cry which sounded like a call in the clear air.

Young hearts always respond to the awakening life of spring, and Hyacinth sang, as she rambled on, a little ditty which she had found in an old book of Miss Bosanquet's, marked in pencil :—

'Sung to me by my dear friend, Hyacinth Woodrow, on the eve of her wedding day.'

Beneath was added,—

'Alas! that that day ever dawned for her.'

The verses were quaint and irregular; but Hyacinth had learned them for her mother's sake, and they suited her mood to-day.

'Sweet are the days of the spring,
When all the copses ring
With the carol of happy birds;
Then my heart within me is stirred
With thoughts of my love.
Will he come—will he come
In the days of the spring?
So sweet—so sweet.

Will he come in the autumn hours,
When the frost has withered the flowers,
And the song-birds sing no more,
And waves beat on a barren shore?
Will he come—will he come
In the autumn days?
But autumn or spring
His coming will be sweet—
Sweet—so sweet.

Love recks not if it rain or shine,
The heart that I love is mine;
And whether in spring's glad time
Or in winter's snow,
I know—I know—
His coming to me will be sweet—
Sweet—sweet—so sweet.'

'That is a pretty song and a fair songstress.'

The words were spoken close by, for stealthy and slow steps had come across the soft turf path between the gorse bushes.

Hyacinth turned in alarm, and saw Mr Royston leaning on his gold-headed stick, and breathing hard. The unwonted exercise of climbing from the cottage to the hillside had been too much for his sixty-five years.

'I—I would fain take the refrain of that sweet song to myself, but I come with bad tidings. Your father, Mistress Hyacinth, is very ill. I have my carriage here and post horses waiting below, and I will take you to Norwich with all speed.'

But Hyacinth had turned and ran down the hill path to the gate of the cottage grounds at a pace Mr Royston could not rival. What with gout and premature decay, Mr Royston at sixty-five was less active than many a man of seventy-five in our day.

Hyacinth had swung the gate behind her before he had reached it; her one idea was to get to the protection of Miss Bosanquet and to

seek her advice. If her father was ill she must go to him, but not with Mr Royston. The bare notion of being shut up in a chariot with him was repulsive.

She ran into the cottage, inquiring eagerly of the servant,—

'Is Miss Bosanquet returned?'

'No, Miss Woodrow; but there's a gentleman seeking you.'

'I know—I know; but, oh, I pray you to send down to the Preventive station and beg her to come home at once. Do not delay; it is urgent.'

The servant, much wondering, did as he was bid, and he had hardly gone when Mr Royston, limping and gasping for breath, reached the porch and made his way into the parlour, where Hyacinth stood like a fawn at bay.

She now summoned her courage and her dignity, for she felt she had beat a somewhat ignominious retreat.

Mr Royston sank into the nearest chair and panted for breath. Hyacinth could not help pitying him, for he seemed quite unable to

speak, and looked ghastly pale as he leaned back in the chair.

'Can I fetch you anything, sir, to revive you?' she asked.

'No, no, my charmer; it is only a—a little fatigue. I shall soon recover.'

'You say my father is ill, sir?'

'I—I regret to say very ill; nor do I think you should delay returning to Castle Meadow. My carriage is at your service. I well know what a dutiful daughter must feel; permit me to offer my profound sympathy.'

He made an effort to leave his chair, and Hyacinth saw the light in his evil eyes which she detested. She drew farther away, and said,—

'I will find means to return to Norwich, sir. Miss Bosanquet, my godmother and best friend, will make it easy for me.'

'But you must come with me, my charmer. The whole matter is arranged. Your father will give you his blessing, and I have his assurance that he will die happy if he knows you are in my safe keeping.'

Every moment that passed, as the tall clock

ticked in the corner, made Hyacinth tremble lest Miss Bosanquet should not return in time. She felt mischief was in the air, for she caught sight through the window of the heads of several menservants behind the hedge of laurel and arbutus.

'He is come to carry me off. I have heard of such things. He is wicked enough to do that. Oh, that help would come!'

And indeed Hyacinth's fears were not without foundation. Mr Royston, having recovered, rose from his chair, and, going towards her, said,—

'I flatter myself, madam, that you will not resist my will. To ease the pillow of a dying father will surely make you ready now to yield yourself to me. I have a special license in my breast pocket, and by to-morrow at this time you will be my wife—my beautiful and charming wife—the lady of Lakenham Hall, with all it possesses, and—'

He put his arm round her and took her hands in his.

She wrenched them from his grasp and said,—

'Leave go, sir! No power in Heaven and earth shall force me to be your wife.'

A small gold whistle hanging to his watch chain was raised to his lips, and there was a tramp of feet on the gravel outside. At the same moment the sound of wheels, and Miss Bosanquet's clear, ringing voice.

'What is your business?' she asked of the foremost of the two men. 'Back, back, if you please, nor prevent me from driving up to my own door.' Then, to her trusty man-servant, 'Jabez, show these men off the premises.'

With a quick, resolute step, Miss Bosanquet walked into the parlour. She made a profound curtsey, saying,—

'To what do I owe the honour of this visit, sir?'

'My dear lady,' Mr Royston began, and then he suddenly stopped.

Bell had followed Miss Bosanquet into the parlour, and now clung to her gown, frightened, she scarcely knew why.

Miss Bosanquet had exchanged little Bell's

cumbersome and heavy black bonnet for a pretty red hood, lined with white, and with a crimped linen frill round her face.

The softest pink was on Bell's cheek, and her large eyes, the colour of a gentian with the dew of the morning in its deep cup, were fixed on the grand gentleman with a wondering fear.

'Again I ask, sir, what is your errand?'

'My dear lady, I have come with bad news for Mistress Hyacinth Woodrow. Her father is dying, and—and I have my chariot here and four post horses, which will speedily convey the—the young lady to her father.'

Mr Royston's eyes sank under Miss Bosanquet's direct, searching gaze.

Hyacinth had come to her for protection, and put her hand through her arm.

'You need not fear, child. I will sift this matter to the bottom.'

Then she bade Bell unloose her cloak and remove her hood, saying as she did so,—

'Make that gentleman a curtsey, Bell, and tell him your name.'

The pink flush deepened to deep crimson as Bell, always obedient, did as she was bid. She went shyly up to Mr Royston and said,—

'My name, sir, is Dulcibel Lulham, but I am called Bell.'

It was as if a spear had passed through that world-worn heart. Mr Royston staggered and fell back on a couch by the window.

'Leave the room, Hyacinth and Bell; but first, sir, be so obliging as to tell Hyacinth whether your account of Mr Woodrow's illness is true or false?'

'He is—he is—he has—been sick—Dr Rigby was summoned.'

'But his life is in no immediate danger, I take it. Now, leave this gentleman to me, and take Bell with you, Hyacinth.'

What passed in that parlour of the cottage between Mr Royston and Miss Bosanquet was never really known. But the brave woman had to deal with a coward, and she did not spare him. He left the house tottering now like an old man, even older than his years. His jaunty

self-assertion was gone. He signed to one of his servants to give him his arm, and so vanished from the sight of those who were watching his departure from the windows.

'Poor wretch!' Miss Bosanquet exclaimed. 'May God forgive him! At least he has heard the truth, and I am thankful I had the spirit to let him hear it; but it has been an effort. May I never have such a task again. At least I have saved Hyacinth from a villain. The sight of that innocent child's fair face awoke remorse; it was as if the dead had come to life. Why, what ails me?' Miss Bosanquet said, as she burst into tears, and flung herself on the couch from which Mr Royston had so lately risen.

True to her promise, Miss Bosanquet went herself with Hyacinth to Norwich the next day, hiring a post chaise at the hotel at Cromer, to which she drove in her pony chaise.

When they arrived at the house in Castle Meadow, Sumpter opened the door.

'How is my father?' Hyacinth asked.

'Much as usual, Miss Hyacinth. Upset to-day by news of Mr Royston.'

'What news?'

'He was struck with paralysis last night, and the doctor don't give much hopes of his life.'

Hyacinth could not speak. She passed Sumpter, and going into the parlour, threw herself on her knees by her father's chair.

'I am come home, father. I will try to please you now.'

'Poor child! Poor child!' Mr Woodrow said. 'Well, there's no question of marrying now. Royston lies at the point of death. Oh, Hyacinth, Hyacinth, my secret dies with him. And yet—yet I feel as though I had killed him. I knew of his scheme to come for you, and take you by hook or by crook, and I let him tell you I was sick to death. Now it is the other way, and what will become of me? I tell you, child, my life, for many years, has been shadowed by that man, and I have dealt in lies and deceit. There is no hope for such as me.'

'Oh, yes, yes, father, there is always hope.

We will try to begin afresh. Now this horrible dread is taken from me of being persecuted by Mr Royston, I feel as if I could bear anything till—till Philip comes home.'

Miss Bosanquet left the father and daughter together. She felt their meeting should be without witnesses, and after some conversation with the worthy Sumpter, she went to Mrs Lulham's to say she should wish to keep Bell for some weeks, till she had really recovered health and strength. Mrs Lulham was out on a round of teaching, but Howson shook her head and said,—

'She will never get well, ma'am; no sea air will ever set her up, and I'd as lief have her home, for I love that child as if she were my own; and there's nobody else to care whether she lives or dies. Mrs Lulham—well, she took her out of charity, and she never forgets she ain't really of her own blood. P'r'aps it's natural, but her poor mother fell into a trap, and the man who ruined her rides about in his chariot, and is as rich as a Jew.'

'He is dying now,' Miss Bosanquet said. 'May God grant him repentance for this and many another sin against Him and his fellow-creatures. Nothing is impossible with God.'

'So they say,' Howson murmured doubtfully. 'It's a wonder to me why the Lord lets wickedness prosper, and poor innocents suffer for the misdoings of other folks.'

'It is a wonder to many,' Miss Bosanquet said. 'Yet we often live to see good coming out of evil, overruled by Infinite Wisdom.'

Howson could only shake her head, and in a choked voice beg to have her love given to the child, and she would fain have her home again.

'You must come and see her, Howson.'

'Lor! I've never been so far as Cromer in my life. I'm not one for a journey like that, ma'am. I've never been farther than Worsted, and that was to see my poor mother, when she lay dying, twenty years ago, and I never look to go as far again. The carrier's waggon I rode

in nearly jolted me to death, and made my bones ache for a month, and I was a young woman then. No, no, I am past a long journey now Too old! too old!'

CHAPTER XII

THE WAY TO CROMER

IT was a May evening, when everything was in the first blush of early summer, when Howson, sitting solitary in her bright kitchen, was rocking herself to and fro, and thinking over the days when little Bell was the joy of her life. She was inclined to be angry with those who had taken her away, and yet they said the sea air would do her good, and this had been a mistake —Bell was no better, and never would be any better. Presently she heard steps on the pavement outside and then they stopped at the door. She knew very well whose steps they were, and for once she was not sorry to see John Crome.

He came in with his basket and asked,—

'How does she fare? Have you heard, ma'am?'

'Yes; she'll never get up May Hill, that's

what I've heard. Missis saw her last week and says she—she is dying.'

Howson threw her apron over her head, and her breast heaved with sobs.

'She ought to come home, that she ought,' John Crome said. 'Why don't you make 'em send her?'

'She is going to her long home, boy. What's the use of talking? You'll never look on her again, nor me neither.'

John Crome said nothing; he did not even bid poor Howson good evening, but he took up his basket and rushed away.

'How many miles is it to Cromer or Sheringham?' he asked of Mr Hicks.

'Twenty odd to Cromer, and six on to Sheringham.

When Dr Rigby returned from a long day's work, for a good many of his patients seemed unlikely to get up May Hill, John Crome waylaid him in the hall.

'Please, sir, will you give me a holiday tomorrow—just till Monday, sir? I always have half Sunday; give me the whole this once, do 'ee, sir.'

The earnestness of the request struck Dr Rigby, but he hesitated.

'What do you want to do to-morrow, eh? Mischief, I'll warrant.'

'No, sir, no; I want to see something very much, something beautiful, something—'

'Well, well, get along with you, and here's an extra shilling for your whole holiday.'

The boy could scarcely contain his delight; he felt even happier than when he possessed the crown-piece which he had so dutifully handed over to his mother.

'Mother will wonder where I am to-morrow, but I can't help it. I am off on pilgrimage, as Bell used to say.'

He crept to his bed early that night, but he only took snatches of sleep, he was so anxious for the first streaks of dawn to show the outline of the surgery casement.

At last it came, and John Crome plunged his head into a tin basin of cold water, made a very hasty toilet, slipped the bolt of the surgery door, and was out in Willow Lane, on which this part of the doctor's house opened.

The morning air was fresh and invigorating, and the great towers of St Giles' Church and St Peter's Mancroft were defined against the clear sky.

Presently John stopped short. He did not know the way to Cromer, and how could he find it?

A watchman on his last round was calling the hour. 'It's just three o'clock, and a fine starlight morning. Where are you running off to, you young scamp?' the watchman said, giving John a somewhat sharp blow with his stick.

'Please, sir, tell me which is the Cromer Road?'

'Cromer Road! What do you want with the Cromer Road, eh?'

'Do 'ee tell me, sir. I want to get there.'

'Twenty miles if it's one to Cromer, but turn down Exchange Street, bottom of Gaol Hill, and then ask your way again.'

John Crome ran on, and heard the watchman call in the distance, 'It's past three o'clock, and a fine starlight morning.' This was a figure of speech, for the stars had paled in the strengthening light and only Venus hung like a silver globe above the sleeping city.

Where there's a will there's a way, and John Crome was not one to be beaten by difficulty, as the story of his boyhood and early manhood abundantly proved.

He pushed on, missed his way, sat down by the wayside to rest his tired feet, and, true to his instincts, forgot his fatigue and the fear that he might never reach his goal, in admiration of a laburnum in a cottage garden swinging its golden tassels in the gentle breeze of early day.

'My! what a colour!' he exclaimed, 'and that's a neat little cottage. Wish I had my brush here and my paper.'

He lay in his favourite position, flat on his face, which rested on his hands, and a great longing possessed him to reproduce that laburnum tree and make it his own.

He roused himself soon and ran on till he came to a village, where most of the inhabitants were asleep, as there was no necessity for early rising on Sunday morning.

A cart stood before the door of a little wayside inn, and John Crome saw on it, to his great delight—'J. Frankland, Sheringham.'

Presently the owner of the cart came out. It was packed with fish-baskets and crates, which had been full the day before for Norwich market, and were now returning empty to Sheringham. The owner of the cart on his way home the night before, had indulged in too strong potations, and had slept heavily till roused by the landlord and told to make himself scarce. Stupid and heavy, he was just clambering into his cart when John Crome said,—

'Give us a lift, sir.'

'I'll see you hanged first.'

But John Crome was not to be discouraged. He sprang into the back of the cart, where the smell of fish was somewhat overpowering, and, too lazy and heavy after last night's drinking to make any resistance to the boy's audacity, the driver smacked his whip and the cart jogged off.

The horse knew its own way, which was fortunate, for the driver was soon nodding with the reins loose in his hand.

Everything was new, and keenly observed by the boy, who crouched amongst empty crates

and fish-baskets in the back of the cart. The first sight of the sea filled him with a strange delight, lying blue, like the sky above it, beyond the prominent tower of Cromer Church. Then came the rolling hills, through which the road lay after the cart had skirted Cromer, and was well on the road to Sheringham. About eleven o'clock the cart rumbled past a picturesque house, and John Crome, standing up, looked over the wall which shut in the garden, and saw a lady sitting with a book in her hand by a couch in the verandah.

John Crome did not wait for the cart to stop. He jumped down as he had jumped up, saying 'This is the place,' and then he stood before the gate of the cottage, peeping through the bars, and doubting no longer that he had reached his goal, when he heard a voice he knew say,—

'I wonder if auntie will let Howson come? She promised. I should like to see Howson.'

Then Miss Bosanquet said, in a gentle, soothing voice,—

'I will try to fetch her to-morrow, dear.'

'I wish to-morrow was to-day,' the child said.

'Perhaps I'll be gone to-morrow to the Heavenly City. I hope they won't turn me back as they did Ignorance.'

'No, Bell, no. I am sure you won't be turned back.'

John Crome had opened the gate and now stood amongst the laurels and arbutus, close to the verandah, where he could see without being seen.

Yes, it was Bell. What could Howson mean when she said she was dying. The colour on her cheek was so bright, and her lips were like rosebuds, only why did she breathe so short? Was that because she was trying to get up May Hill.

Tired and hungry, and filled with apprehensions that, after all, that tall lady would be angry with him for coming, John Crome's courage began to give way.

He had looked on her—the lovely child who had filled his dreams for many weeks, and had awoke in him the artist's longing to paint her as he painted, or rather tried to paint, everything that was fair and beautiful in God's world. Thus, amidst all the sordid surroundings of his childhood and boyhood, little Bell took the foremost place

amongst the beautiful things he cherished in his heart.

The pictures of fair ladies in the shop windows, the purple shadows passing over Mousehold, as the snowy clouds floated in the blue sky—the shining of the river at Thorpe, where the brown-sailed wherries passed and re-passed—the orchards of his native city all dressed in pink and white—all these were a part of his life, and little Bell was one of them, fair and unattainable it might be, but still in some subtle way belonging to him. Uncouth in manner, ignorant and untaught, the divine spark of genius was there in that rough, boyish nature, and it was struggling to assert its power every time he made futile attempts to express by outward signs the inner consciousness of his gift.

'I daren't go no nearer,' he thought; 'that tall lady would be angry.'

But the tall lady disappeared through the open window, and Bell lay quite quiet with closed eyes.

If only she had not breathed so short and quick, John Crome would have been satisfied she was getting well. He crept from his hiding-place

and drew near to the verandah over which pink monthly roses and honeysuckle were clustering in profusion. He had attained his heart's desire, and he was looking at Bell with a hungry eagerness.

The slight movement made her open her gentian eyes. It did not startle her to see John Crome looking at her. She put out one of her little, white, thin hands and said dreamily,—

'Have you brought auntie some physic? Ah! I forgot—I am at the Cottage, not—not with Howson.' At the mention of her old friend's name her lips quivered. 'I want Howson,' she said.

'I'll make her come, or'—with sudden eagerness —'you shall come along home to her.'

Bell had collected her thoughts now, and she said very gravely,—

'No, Johnnie Crome. I am going to the Golden City; I shall never go home any more. Mind you come if you can, and keep in the narrow way, straight, quite straight till you get to the dark river.' Then with a sigh, 'I wish I hadn't to go into the river first, but the King of the City will send somebody to help me through.'

'My dear child!' It was Miss Bosanquet's voice. 'Who is this? Go away directly. What are you doing here?'

'It's Johnnie Crome, ma'am. He has come to see me. Don't, don't speak sharp to him.'

Poor Johnnie, he did not present a very engaging appearance. His dusty boots were old and far too big for his feet. His trousers, which were buttoned to the short waist of his jacket, were a good deal the worse for wear. The clean Sunday frill which his mother always provided for him when he went home for his half holiday was absent from his toilet. The low cut of his jacket displayed a very brown neck, and his thick hair was shaggy and unbrushed.

Miss Bosanquet was a keen observer, and something in the pair of earnest, sorrowful eyes, turned up to her in appeal, struck her as remarkable.

'What brought you here?' she asked. You know this dear little girl is very ill, and cannot bear to see any stranger?

'He isn't a stranger,' Bell said; 'he used to come with auntie's physic from the doctor. He is a good boy.'

'No I ain't,' Johnnie said, 'but I wanted to see her, ma'am. I won't stay. Good-bye, Bell, good-bye.'

He was turning to go when Miss Bosanquet said,—

'Stop; you must have your dinner. How are you getting back to Norwich?'

But Johnnie shook his head. He stood for one moment and gave a long, earnest glance at the fair picture before him—the child lying under the drooping rose branches—the sweet eyes looking at him with a divine pity in them—pity which she could not explain, but which brought the tears to her eyes.

'Good-bye, Johnnie. Tell Will you've seen me. Tell the pretty young lady, and tell Howson, with my love.'

But again her voice faltered, and in another moment the gate had swung behind John Crome, and he was off on his long and toilsome journey back to Norwich. He struggled bravely on; he

bought a dinner of bread and cheese at the first inn he passed, and, footsore and weary, yet with the happiness of having attained the end he had in view, he reached Dr Rigby's house when the watchman was again calling the hour of 'Three o'clock, and a fine starlight morning,' and the dawn was breaking in the east. John Crome found Mr Hicks had not locked the surgery door. He opened it softly, and crept to his bed, where, utterly worn out, he fell into a profound sleep—the sleep tired children know after unwonted fatigue of body and mind—a sleep which in after years refuses to come when bidden to soothe the pillow of the weary with blissful dreams.

BOOK II

THE CHILD IS FATHER TO THE MAN

'The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises; and God made it all!
For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it, and the sky above?

. . . . . .

. . . . What's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? Oh! this last, of course! you say.
But why not *do* as well as *say*—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip.

. . . . . .

For don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. *Art was given for that;*
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out.'

ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER TEN YEARS

1788.—Ten years had passed, and brought with them many changes to those whose history we have followed in childhood and early youth.

The indomitable spirit of John Crome, and his perseverance in overcoming difficulties, had been in some manner rewarded, though a great deal of hard work was still before him. When he left Dr Rigby's service, he had been apprenticed for some years to a house and sign painter, named Whisler, and had earned a scanty pittance after hours by painting on his own account signboards, and even sugar ornaments for confectioners, thus gaining by honest means his daily bread. But he had been happy in finding a kindred spirit in a youth about his own age, named Ladbrooke, who was apprenticed to a printer. As soon as these two lads were their

own masters, they joined in hiring a garret where, often in want of the necessaries of life, they made a gallant struggle to attain some proficiency in their beloved art.

It was Maundy Thursday in the spring of the year 1788, and the two boys, for they were little more, were full of spirit and full of hope. By scraping together every available shilling, and living chiefly on bread and milk and water for their daily food, they had succeeded in buying some prints from the works of good masters. The two friends had set to work to copy them in colours, and had found a sale for the copies at the shop of the printsellers of whom the engravings had been bought, and this brought Crome into notice.

The printsellers were men of taste, and displayed the pictures to their customers, telling the story of the self-denying labours of the two lads who had produced them.

It was yet early on the morning of the great Norwich Fair day, and John Crome was putting the finishing touches to a copy of one of Hobbema's pictures from the print he had bought. A

signboard stood with its face to the wall, and that, too, was ready to be sent to its destination.

Crome's friend had gone out to buy a roll and a pint of milk for breakfast, and John Crome was singing over his work, and looking at it from every point, to assure himself that the drawing was correct, for he was to take it that day to the house of Mr Harvey, at Catton, a gentleman who had a fine collection of pictures, and who had heard from the printseller of the young artist's efforts.

Having satisfied himself as to the copy of the print, John Crome opened the lattice window and took in a mug of daffodils, which he had bought for a penny in the market.

The freshness of the sweet spring air came over the roofs and chimneys of the houses, and the sun flooded the poor, bare garret with light, which made the daffodils a blaze of golden beauty.

John Crome could not have said, if he had been asked, why his thoughts went back to a spring-time long ago, to a child lying under the drooping branches of a climbing rose, who had

awakened in his boy's heart a longing for all that was pure and good and beautiful. It was but a dim memory, but little Bell had left her mark on Johnnie Crome's life. Thoughts of her came to him sometimes, like an angel's visit, unawares, as they did now. He went to a pile of old drawings heaped in a corner, and after some searching drew out a rough bit of paper, on which was a rude attempt to represent boughs of roses, and beneath the figure of a sleeping child; it was but a poor attempt, but somehow it awoke slumbering memories and a tender regret. Her words came back to him,—

'Mind you come to the City, and keep in the straight narrow way.'

'Well, Johnnie, what's up?' It was Ladbrooke's voice. 'You look as grave as a judge, and when I went away you were singing lustily over that picture. Let's see what you have got there. Lor, what a queer old thing! When did you do that?'

'Years ago,' Crome said.

'And who was the child? She ain't badly

done, and her hair is the colour of—you know whose. Where is she now?'

'She is dead,' Crome said. Then, correcting himself, he said, 'She has got to the Golden City, so I can't call her dead.'

Then, with a sigh, Crome put away in a box, containing his very small possessions, this fragment of his old life, and resuming his careless manner, said,—

'Is the Fair full to-day?'

'Yes. They say there are large droves of cattle and flocks of sheep gone up to Castle Hill, and Castle Meadow, and Tombland are full of shows. I think I shall have a look round while you are gone to Catton. I have promised to take my fair lady through the Fair this evening. There's her sister waiting for you,' Ladbrooke said, giving Crome a friendly poke in the ribs.

'Get out! Don't be a fool. I ain't so sure that the sister wants me.'

'I am, then; and they are a pretty pair, and I am in love with one, I can tell you. Come along this evening, won't you?'

'I ain't sure I am thinking of Catton now.'

'It's a grand house, so I hear,' Ladbrooke said, 'and full of curiosities, and the walls hung with pictures.'

'Are you coming with me?'

'No, I'll wait and hear how you get through. I'm not smart enough to mix with gentry.'

'And if you aren't, I am sure I ain't. But how can you and I be smart when we've got to toil for our bread? If I can sell that picture, and get paid for the sign, I'll rig out with a second-hand coat and breeches.'

''Tis time you did, Johnnie; you'll excuse me for saying so.'

'You are right enough. While my poor mother was alive I had somebody to keep me pretty decent; now she is gone, and Peg married, I have no one to care whether I am in rags or not.'

'Ah!' Ladbrooke said, 'you and I must look out for wives—that's the truth.'

'Pooh! to live in this garret and starve along with us,' were Crome's last words, as he put his picture, with two others, into a shabby portfolio, and set off on his way to Catton.

He had not gone far when, in the throng of pleasure-seekers, he pushed against a woman who, looking up at him, exclaimed,—

'My goodness, if it ain't John Crome! I've not set eyes on you for ever so long. You might look in once a year, anyhow. You are got up in the world, I suppose, since you was the doctor's surgery boy.'

Howson's tone was aggrieved, and Crome hastened to say,—

'I don't look like up in the world, do I? And I've to work pretty hard, I can tell you.'

Howson looked him up and down, and her mood changed.

'Poor boy!' she said, 'I ain't one to quarrel with old friends; besides, I always think of you when I think of little Bell. P'r'aps you've forgotten her.'

'No, I haven't; I have been thinking of her to-day.'

'Bless you for it! I thought when she died my heart would break, but now I've come, long ago, to think it was well God took her, dear lamb! There was none to love her. As to my missis,

it was just a burden lifted when she went. No one wanted her but a poor old woman, who could do nothing for her but love her. But I can't help picturing to myself what she would be now if she were alive—a real beauty, with her gold hair, and eyes the colour of the skies; why, like yonder girl standing over there. Her hair is the same colour, and she has pink and white cheeks, and just such a smile. Do you see her, John Crome?'

'Yes.'

John looked across the street, where two girls were standing, and saw they were the sisters—one of whom was Ladbrooke's fair one. His sallow face grew a dark red, and saying to Howson that he would look in on her before long, he walked away.

Hyacinth Woodrow was seated at her tapestry frame in the parlour at Castle Meadow on this same Maundy Thursday when John Crome was on his way to Catton.

Presently Bridget came into the room.

'Aren't you going to look at the Fair?' she

asked. 'What's the good of moping? You are losing all your pretty looks and winning ways.'

Hyacinth looked up with a sad smile.

'I am in no mood for fairs and merry-making, Bridget, and I think Maundy Thursday is ill-chosen for all the frolic and hubbub of Tombland Fair.'

'It's a custom hundreds of years old,' Bridget said. 'Lor! who has put that notion into your head? It's that parson, I warrant. Are you a-going to marry him—eh?'

'No!' Hyacinth said, with a heightened colour, '*no!* I have told you so before.'

'And are you waiting for that young man to come back? You'll wait till your hair is white.'

'Very well, I am quite ready to wait.'

'It's stuff and nonsense; he is a loo-warm lover, seems to me, never to write, never to come. But there! I never can understand you, and I give it up.'

'That's right, Bridget, give it up. But though I am not going to the Fair, I am going to Catton to get out of the noise.'

'To Catton! And how will you get there, pray?'

'On my feet. I have not lost the use of them, though I am, as you say, getting old.'

'I never said so. Of course you ought to be married at twenty-nine, but I suppose you wish to be an old maid like Miss Bosomket. Your poor papa never wished you to be an old maid, though it's a mercy you did not let that old villain get hold of you. There he is still; and who is to have his money, I wonder? P'r'aps it will all come to you.'

'Nonsense, Bridget! I thought I had forbidden you to speak of that subject! Do, pray, oblige me by never referring to it!'

Hyacinth spoke decidedly—almost harshly—and Bridget left the room, giving the door a sharp bang as she did so.

'Wait till my hair is grey,' Hyacinth repeated. 'Yes, I shall wait, but it is hard never to get a word or a sign from him. Sometimes I think he must be dead, and then I think that if he were dead he would make me some sign. I should *feel* him near in spirit, and now it is all

cold—cold—voiceless separation. Five years—five long years, and I have heard nothing since the letter which told me he had finished his work for the tea merchants and would soon be on his way home over the great Atlantic Ocean, and he has never come. I have asked that dear old Quaker gentleman at the Bank for tidings till I am ashamed to ask again, only to get the same reply—that he had given every satisfaction to his employers, and that he was returning with some important papers relating to the export of tea, and from that day to this neither they, his employers, nor anyone else had heard of him. As I pass the Bank to-day I will try once more, though every time I get the same answer I feel more hopeless.'

Hyacinth Woodrow had lost the first freshness of youth, and perhaps looked older than her twenty-nine years. She had passed through much trouble in nursing her father in his last days. He had lingered on for some years in a state of irritable helplessness, which it was hard to meet bravely, and the quiet, secluded life Hyacinth had led for so long shut her out

from the ordinary pleasures and interests of youth. Dr Rigby was her kindest and best friend, his wife and children were almost her only companions, and lately an old gentleman and his wife at Catton were anxious to befriend her.

Miss Bosanquet seldom left the Cottage now, for she had fallen heavily on one of her rounds of charity and broken her hip, which made her a cripple for the rest of her life. Hyacinth paid her visits at intervals, but she was never at ease in her own house. Miss Bosanquet was apt to rally her on her depression, and had of late begun to take old Bridget's view of her case, and advise her to bury the dead past out of sight and, believing that Philip Sandford was dead, turn her attention elsewhere.

There was in Hyacinth an extraordinary strength of will and a desperate clinging to the love of her early years. It is possible that, as many of us have done, she clothed Philip with imaginary perfections, which made the image cherished in her heart an ideal rather than a reality.

'I will never marry another man,' she re-

peated to herself continually. 'Never! Why do people imagine I could ever forget him? If it had not been for me he would never have been sent away from his native land. It was all through the machinations of that wicked old man to get him out of the way, as if by such means he could have made me marry him. May God forgive him, and for the threats he held over my poor father, poisoning his life by them, when he was the tempter and my poor, weak father the tempted.'

All this was passing through Hyacinth's mind while she was preparing to go out to get, as she said, away from the hubbub before the windows. To spend a day at Catton with the Harveys had lately become a real pleasure to her, and the 'parson,' of whom Bridget spoke so contemptuously, was Mr Harvey's nephew, and the curate of the Church of St Michael at Plea on the Bank Plain. Hyacinth was ready for her walk, and calling to Bridget to bid her good-bye, told her to be sure to go to the Fair and buy some gingerbread for her as she used to do when she was a little girl.

'Ay, you were as pleased as Punch to look at the shows then. But now you are too high and mighty for fairs, and too *religious*, too, I suppose!'

'Poor Bridget!' Hyacinth said, 'I am not a bit what you like me to be, am I? Give me a kiss, there's a dear old Bridget.'

Bridget held her cheek to be kissed; but as she toddled back to the kitchen, where Sumpter was getting impatient for his dumplings and gravy, she said,—

'She'll be an old maid, I warrant; it's a shame, that it is, and all for that fellow—young Sandford. I've no patience with it.'

Hyacinth's courage failed her when she reached the Bank; she felt as if she could not ask the question and receive the same answer.

As she was hesitating, a gig turned out of the stable-yard where the horses of the partners in the Bank were put up while they were transacting their business across the road, and the kindly Quaker gentleman drew up his steady grey mare and said,—

'I was on the point of sending thee a note, Hyacinth Woodrow.'

Hyacinth's heart beat tumultuously, and the question died on her lips.

'Peter Royston died this morning, and without a will; but can't I drive thee to thy destination? Tombland Fair-day is not pleasant walking for a young woman alone.'

The relief was so great, when she found that the note which had been intended for her did not contain ill news at least of Philip, that Hyacinth could only spring up to her seat by her old friend's side, saying,—

'I shall be glad, sir, if you will drive me to Mr Harvey's at Catton.'

'Come, now, this is fortunate; I am on my way to Thomas Harvey's. I am curious myself about pictures, and our friend desires me to see some productions of a youth in Norwich who has gone through all manner of hardships for the love of his craft. Well, well, he has a good patron now in Thomas Harvey, and he will make his way, I don't doubt. But this is a strange matter about Peter Royston. The

lawyer, Henry Clement, made a will some twenty years ago, but it is nowhere to be found. Extraordinary! And there are no heirs. Ah! I forgot,' the kind old gentleman said, 'I forgot—there ought to be an heir—poor young Sandford, his half-sister's son. Dear! dear! That was a sad business, a better youth never served us, and my relations in London say the same; it's nearly four years since we heard of him.'

'*Five*,' Hyacinth said, in a voice which made her kind old friend remember that Philip's fate interested his companion more than anyone.

He hastily changed the subject, whipped up the old horse, and was speedily clear of the streets on the Catton Road.

They found Mr Harvey in a very genial mood, and in high spirits.

'Come in, come in,' he said; 'you are kindly welcome, and I have made a discovery which ought to please all Norwich folk and make them proud for their old city. A youth is now painting in the blue parlour who is a genius, yes, a born genius. Why, to see him go the round and look at the pictures in the room was a

treat. He was ready to worship that masterpiece of Hobbema's and the Gainsborough. It was pathetic, too, for he sighed out that he should never be able to do like that. I clapped him him on the back, and told him he should not fail if I could help it. I shall let him work here as often as he chooses, and then I shall send him to London to my good friend Mr William Beechey. We must brush him up a bit first; he is all in the rough, poor fellow! and I wonder how he lives. I asked him, and he said, "By painting trumpery at odd times—signboards and the like." The notion of it! Come and see Crome before we sit down to dinner.'

Mr Harvey led the way to the blue parlour, where they found John Crome provided by his patron with a canvas set up on an easel, and brushes and paints, opposite a landscape of Hobbema's.

So intent was Crome on his work that he did not look up till Mr Harvey touched him on the shoulder.

'Here's a gentleman and lady, boy, come to make your acquaintance.'

John Crome rose awkwardly, and instead of responding to Mr Harvey, he brushed back the hair which shadowed his broad forehead, and looking at Hyacinth, said,—

'You've forgot me, miss.'

'*No*,' Hyacinth said; 'I have often wished to know what had become of you after you left Dr Rigby's, but you are grown from a little boy to a man, and if I had met you, I should scarcely have recognised you. I am very glad to see you once more,' and Hyacinth held out her hand, which John Crome took in his large, paint-stained fingers, and gave it a hearty shake; then he seated himself before the easel again, and took no further notice of the visitors.

Mrs Harvey was a somewhat mincing lady, 'a fine lady' who delighted in 'poor health' and eschewed fresh air, which was kept out of the spacious mansion on the slope of Catton Hill by every possible means. She had taken a fancy to Hyacinth, for her nephew, the curate of Saint Michael's, had mentioned her as living a lonely life with two old servants on the Castle

Meadow, and asked Mrs Harvey to show her some attention.

On this bright spring day all the windows and doors of Catton Hill were hermetically sealed, and Hyacinth was received in a parlour on the opposite side of the hall from the blue parlour where Crome was working, Mrs Harvey, wrapped up in shawls, reclining on a lounge, close to the blazing wood fire on the hearth.

'But very indifferent, my dear Miss Woodrow,' she said in reply to Hyacinth's inquiry as to her health. 'I hope you were well wrapped up driving here in an open gig. The seeds of consumption are soon sown, as I know by experience—sad experience!' and a short, perfunctory cough accompanied the words. 'Oh! my dear George, you have not closed the door—such a whiff of cold air came in.'

This was addressed to the young clergyman who had arrived for the two o'clock dinner. He was a representative of the then increasing number of young and earnest men touched with the enthusiasm of the Methodist movement, and yet adhering loyally to the Church which was only

beginning to awake from the long torpor and carelessness which had so marred her usefulness and had perplexed those of her members, who were dissatisfied with the cold and heartless ministration provided for them, and yet did not like to leave her for other communions.

George Harvey was a fine specimen of the young enthusiast, and Hyacinth had come under his influence. It was new to her to listen to burning words of eloquent appeal, and to have the religion of Christ brought to bear upon the requirements of daily life. The rector of Saint Michael's was old and infirm, and quite content to leave everything to his young curate.

Wednesday evening services were begun; it was quite an uncommon event for any church to be open during the week, and till Mr Harvey had come to Saint Michael's, Norwich, one slovenly service, got through on alternate mornings and afternoons on Sunday, had been the rule. Who can wonder that many of the intelligent and intellectual inhabitants of Norwich deserted the church for the Octagon Chapel, to which Martineaus and Taylors and many others resorted to listen

to critical discourses and to prayers which were not read, or rather gabbled, from a book.

Hyacinth had lately begun to fear that Mr Harvey was thinking of her in another light than that of a convert to the doctrines which he preached with so much earnestness. She liked his society well enough, found herself looking forward to his visits, and his reading and exposition of the Bible at a class he held in the dilapidated vestry of his church. He was a graduate of Cambridge, and well read and with cultivated tastes, so that his friendship had become a very pleasant element in Hyacinth's life.

Mr Harvey had, of course, heard the story of Hyacinth's earlier life, of her resistance to her father's will in refusing to marry the rich old man, who was ready to endow her with his fortune, and take her from a life of straitened means to one of luxury and ease. He had heard, too, of her lover, Philip Sandford, of whom no tidings had reached Norwich for years, everyone feeling certain that he had been lost at sea, as the small ship in which he was

supposed to have sailed had never been heard of. In those days ships were often missing, and their fate never traced. There were no full lists in the papers of outward-bound and homeward-bound vessels, and no means of inquiry by telegrams as to the time of the ship leaving her port, the names of her passengers, the cargo she carried, or other details, which are now within the immediate reach of every shipowner in the kingdom.

Mr Harvey had always a welcome for his nephew, and he was in a very jocund mood as he sat to-day at the head of his hospitable board.

'I've got a genius in the house, George,' he said; 'a boy who will be famous as a painter some day.'

'Indeed, sir, I know how clever you are in finding out works of art, but this is something new, your finding an artist. Norwich seems to be a climate in which talent flourishes.'

'Genius, boy, genius; not talent, please.'

George Harvey laughed.

'It comes to the same thing, sir, I suppose, in the end.'

'No, no; you are wrong there. What do you say, Miss Woodrow?'

'It is hard to define the difference, sir,' Hyacinth said, 'but I suppose genius is original creation, and talent imitation.'

'Well said! well said! Miss Woodrow, you have hit the nail on the head!'

'I have just been at Cambridge, sir, to take my degree, and there I heard much of another Norwich boy who bids fair to be a leading musician. The extraordinary powers of this child of scarcely fourteen have made a vast sensation in Cambridge.'

'Ah! you mean William Crotch. I have heard of him, and of his mother's blind devotion to him —folly, rather!'

'Well, sir, the fact remains that the boy is a born musician. Not only can he play the works of the great masters on the organ and piano, but he handles the violin with great skill, and composes pieces which are marvels of correctness and have a wondrous charm about them.'

Hyacinth's old friend, who had brought her to Catton, now freed himself from listening to a

long history of Mrs Harvey's ailments, with the various cures she had tried for her cough and asthma, to say,—

'I've heard of that boy; he is the son of that clever carpenter Crotch, in Saint George's, Colgate. Music is nothing to me, but I must say the account of that child's performances have interested me. What have thee to tell further of him?' he said, addressing George Harvey. 'I marvel that he is alive if all that was said is true of his parents' conduct, making the boy, when a babe in his mother's arms, play to a crowd of curious folks. I did not believe half I heard, and not having any liking for music myself, I never went to his performances. Of late I have not heard him mentioned.'

'Because, sir, he went to Cambridge to study under Dr Randall there when only eleven years old.'

'More's the pity! he will never live to be a man.'

'Do not take so gloomy a view of the case, sir. The boy is well-grown, and it is said can sit for hours at the organ without fatigue. It is

considered a loss to Cambridge that he is to be removed to Oxford and educated for the Church. But it is a general opinion that he will never relinquish the musical profession. It is said he is engaged in composing an oratorio he names 'The Captivity of Judah!'

'Dear, dear! what a prodigy!' Mr Harvey exclaimed. 'As you say, George, there must be something in the air of Norwich to produce these wonders of music and art. By-the-bye,' Mr Harvey said, suddenly breaking off and addressing the servant, 'I hope that young man in the blue parlour has had his dinner?'

'The young man said, sir, he was too much engaged to eat a dinner, lest the light should fail before he had got his picture forward.'

'Tut! tut! what's the merit of starving? Excuse me, gentlemen, I must see that my young painter gets proper sustenance.'

And the good old man bustled off to threaten John Crome with a galloping consumption if he did not eat enough to keep soul and body together.

Hyacinth had been silent during dinner. Mr Royston's death was talked of, and the probable destination of his large fortune discussed.

'It has been a living death for years, I hear, but this is a queer thing about the will. It will turn up.'

'No, of that there is no probability,' the Quaker gentleman said. 'There is a story current, so my friend lawyer Clement says, that he burned it with his own hand on the very night he had the first stroke—his valet says so; and after that stroke his mind was a blank and he was never in a fit condition to sign a will. A pitiable story from first to last.'

'That young man who was lost at sea would have come in as heir-at-law, I suppose?' Mr Harvey said. 'And if so—'

A quick glance at Hyacinth's face, from which all the colour had vanished, made George Harvey say abruptly,—

'I must be on my way back to Norwich, Aunt Mary, if you will allow me to take my leave.'

He rose as he spoke, and Hyacinth was thankful for the move which Mrs Harvey made to

the parlour, asking her to give her an arm as she was very weak from continual coughing.

Hyacinth sat with her patiently for an hour, listening to the querulous complaints of a nervous invalid, hearing and making the necessary rejoinders while her thoughts were far away.

'If only he had been here,' her heart said, 'he would have had the wealth which has hitherto been used for selfish indulgence. Ah! if he had only been here.' They all spoke of him as lost at sea, and she found herself going over in her mind the probable and possible circumstances of Philip's death. And all the time Mrs Harvey was thinking that Miss Woodrow was a very agreeable young person, and that her manners were genteel, and that she could show some sympathy and feel for her poor health, and she must invite her to spend a week or two with her for a little change of scene, adding mentally,—

'I should not be surprised if George took a fancy to her; but with his Methodist views he might even think it wrong to fall in love.'

Mrs Harvey's cogitations were disturbed by her husband coming to say that he had given John Crome leave to come any day and copy the pictures.

'Dear me,' his wife said, 'this is a new craze. I wonder what will be the next?'

'Precisely like it, my dear, if I can hit upon another budding genius like John Crome; but that is not very probable, so make your mind easy.'

Hyacinth's kind old friend drove her back to Norwich and dropped her near the corner of Castle Meadow.

The shows were now in full swing, merry-go-rounds and swings were in great request, bells were ringing, clowns were cracking feeble jokes, ladies in very short frocks and tinsel ornaments were performing on the platform in front of the show to tempt the gaping crowd below to go in and 'see the performance for threepence —children 'alf price.'

Such a confusion of noises it was! Penny whistles were sending out their shrill notes, a cheap Jack under a glaring oil lamp inviting the

people to bid for all manner of articles, while from a distance came the lowing of over-driven, tired cattle, and bleating sheep, many having changed owners on their way homewards.

Hyacinth sat down by the fire which Bridget had kept bright and clear for her return, and in the gathering twilight a sense of loneliness oppressed her. The busy, noisy crowds outside seemed to jar on her and make her realise her solitary life more vividly.

'There is no one to care very much about me. Bridget and poor old Sumpter care in their own way, but I long—yes, I do long for the love which was mine once and can never, never be mine again.'

CHAPTER XIV

PROPOSALS

TEARS fell thick and fast as Hyacinth went to an old bureau and took from it the few letters she had received from Philip. The last, written nearly five years before, was so full of hope of reunion; he was happy, he said, in being now able to offer her a home in London, where he was to take an important post in the rich tea merchant's office, with a good salary, which would satisfy her father that he could make a suitable provision for her.

Her father was dead before that letter reached her, and ever since there had been the wearing suspense, the alternations of hope and fear, the long-drawn-out anxiety which had shadowed her life and made her, as Bridget said, 'old for her years.'

The two tall, silver candlesticks stood on the

table with the snuffer-dish, but Hyacinth had told Bridget not to light them, she liked a 'little blind man's holiday.'

'Just that she may sit and mope and cry, I believe,' Bridget said to her husband. 'She will go into a decline if she isn't roused. I have a mind to let Miss Bosomket know, only I can't write, worse luck!'

Hyacinth had read the old letters by the flickering flames of the wood fire, and had just put them into the reticule at her side, when Bridget again appeared.

'That young parson is at the door wanting to see you, Miss Hyacinth. Will you see him?'

'Yes; ask Mr Harvey to come in.'

'I hope I am not intruding,' George Harvey said.

'No! oh, no! I am glad to see you, for I feel very lonely. Perhaps it is the crowds of people outside and the noise and babble of the Fair which make me rather sad.'

'You do not want to go to the Fair, I take it?' Mr Harvey said, laughing.

'No, indeed, but I was thinking of the days when I did go to the Fair with Bridget and spend the money my godmother sent me for fairings, and almost wishing I was a child again. Then to-day I have heard something which has sent my thoughts back to the past — to my youthful days, not my childhood. Sad days they were, not all happy ones, except for the possession of something which I have lost now, something that can never be mine again. But,' she said hastily, 'I don't want to talk about myself. It can't be interesting to you.'

'Miss Woodrow, it is deeply interesting. I saw to-day, at my uncle's house, that you were very silent and depressed. You will pardon me if I say I can divine the cause. I have not lived in Norwich ten months without hearing of your trials and sorrows. They have touched me deeply.'

Hyacinth's manner changed at once.

'I must beg you, sir, to speak on some other subject. There are some troubles which cannot bear even the touch of a friendly hand, and such, I am well aware, is yours. Let us talk

of the Fair. You were saying the other day how concerned you were to find the inhabitants of Norwich bent on pleasure this week. It is an old custom, and Good Friday has been a welcome holiday for working people.'

'Yes,' Mr Harvey said, 'and all this ignorance of the teaching of the Church is due to her own carelessness. Good Friday is the most solemn day of the year, and I have found most of my parishioners planning how to spend this day as a holiday, and amazed at my begging them to attend the service at church to-morrow. I have read the sermon appointed for every day this week to almost empty pews, and my doing so has been thought extraordinary.'

'I have been to several of the services,' Hyacinth said. 'To-day I was thankful to get away from all the din and noise before this house and accept Mr Harvey's invitation to Catton. I mean to come to-morrow and try and bring my old servant Bridget along with me.'

Mr Harvey was silent, and a long pause followed.

The ringing of bells, the sound of many voices, all the confused noises and hubbub of the Fair came from outside. Within there was an occasional crackle of the wood on the hearth, or the sudden fall of a log, which sent dozens of sparks up the chimney, and a quick leaping up of a flame which showed the faces of the two people who sat opposite each other.

The young clergyman's face was grave and thoughtful. He was turning over in his mind whether he should tell that beautiful woman, whose eyes showed traces of recent tears, that she need no longer lead a lonely life if she could consent to look with favour upon his suit.

He had a moderate competence, and was not dependent on the profession he had chosen, from conscientious motives, at what was then considered late in life, for he was in his thirtieth year. He was fired with the most ardent desire to gather into the fold the sheep who were at that time most significantly without a shepherd.

Hyacinth felt as if she could not break the

silence, and with womanly instinct she feared what was at hand. She rose abruptly at last and said,—

'I must ring for Bridget to have the candles lighted.'

She had her hand on the bell-rope when her companion said,—

'May I ask you, Miss Woodrow, to wait before you summon your servant. I have something I want to say to you.'

Hyacinth's heart beat fast, and knowing now what was coming, she sat down again, while George Harvey said, in a voice trembling with emotion,—

'You say you are lonely and often sad. May I venture to ask to be permitted to do my best to fill the void left in your life, and to endeavour to be worthy of the confidence you repose in me? I think we might be of mutual comfort to each other, and I know, from what you have told me, you long to serve the Master I serve, and that being so, I feel that He would not withhold His blessing from me if I am so happy as to win your favour.'

Hyacinth clasped her hands tightly, as if to brace herself for her answer.

'I—I almost wonder, Mr Harvey, that you should make me this proposal. You do me great honour, I am well aware, but from hints you have thrown out I feel sure you know my story. I promised to be faithful to Philip Sandford, my first, my only love, and I will not break my promise. I cannot listen to the suit of any other man while I am uncertain as to whether he is alive or dead. You are right, I am lonely, and my old spirit seems to have died out for ever. But you—yes, you, sir—have directed me to better consolation than this world can offer, and I ask you to pray that I may find it.'

Mr Harvey stood erect before her. Lovers of his time knelt at their mistress's feet and poured forth adulation and flattery by the yard. But George Harvey was not that manner of suitor. Moreover, he felt the dignity of his office as a clergyman, and even if it had not been so he was thoroughly single-hearted, and disliked all exaggerated expressions in love as in everything else.

Yet he did love Hyacinth, and insensibly the relations he had with her as a minister had brought him to feel that she was the one woman in the world for him. His face showed pale with emotion as the firelight flickered on it. He was evidently making a great effort to speak calmly and to say nothing that could hurt her who had so resolutely rejected his suit.

'Do not be vexed with me,' Hyacinth pleaded. 'I am so sorry you have said this to me. I—I found your friendship a great help and pleasure, and now—now it cannot ever be the same again.'

'I will do my utmost in future, Miss Woodrow, that it shall be the same. I will not again touch upon this matter, or trouble you with it. But you must allow me to say, once for all, that you can never be indifferent to me, and that the pain, yes, the deep pain which your rejection has given me, will never change the respect and admiration for you which, from all I have heard and all I know of you, is deep, and, with my love, will be lasting.'

He was turning to leave the room without

another word when Hyacinth went up to him and said,—

'Give me a blessing. Do not leave me thus.'

Then he raised his hand and said,—

'The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you peace, now and for evermore.'

As Hyacinth stood with bowed head where he left her, she heard the outer door sharply shut, and the next moment she had thrown herself on the couch by the fire and cried bitterly.

'Oh, I am sorry,' she moaned, 'but what else could I do? How can I give myself to another when I am Philip's promised wife? Yet, if I had been free, he is just the man who would have helped me to begin a new and better life. He is good and true, and I could trust him. Was ever any woman so unhappy in the story of love as I have been?—the cause, the unwitting cause, of the banishment of one man from his native country, to die, perhaps, in a foreign land or be lost at sea; then to give pain and distress to another, for they were written on his face, which is usually so bright and happy. I have no one

to tell, no one to show sympathy with me. If I go to Sheringham my godmother will say—I know she will—that I have been foolish to reject Mr Harvey. If I tell poor old Bridget she will be angry with me, and tell me I am sure to be an old maid and other ridiculous things of that sort. But he told me he would still be my friend, and he will find someone else to be what he wanted me to be. I will try to listen to what he says in his sermons, and perhaps I shall find that comfort of which he spoke. I sorely want it. I think every month I live I feel more alone. Everyone means to be kind—and they are kind—but nothing fills the void, nothing stills the weary, anxious looking for news of him which never comes. No one thinks much about Philip now, and soon he will pass away from the recollection of Norwich people as if he had never lived here. Then there is all that money. What will be done with it? That poor old man, what a living death his has been for all these years, and how strange if Philip ever comes back —that he, whom he hated and despised, should

have that large fortune. Poor, wretched old man! What is it all to him now? Nothing. He and the poorest of the poor who died to-day are alike now. There are no differences between rich and poor in the grave.'

CHAPTER XV

'THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH'

'THE Backs' of the Colleges at Cambridge were in their full beauty on a bright day of May in 1798. The close-shaven turf beneath the grey walls of Trinity was sparkling with a thousand dewdrops in the sunshine of early morning.

Undergraduates were scampering towards the Chapel, their gowns flying in the breeze, for the last stroke of the bell, calling them to matins, had ceased—the service at which all the members of the College were supposed to be present.

It was a habit then, as now, for the majority of the men to run it very close, and only get to their places in the choir just before and often after the service had begun.

The thrushes and blackbirds in the gardens

were singing their matins with a ceaseless but never wearisome repetition, taking up the strain when the nightingales left off at early dawn. The air was full of music, the river rippled, the leaves on the trees rustled, from afar came the lowing of cattle and the cawing of rooks, softened by distance. The flowering shrubs filled the air with fragrance, and not a note of Nature's music, nor a waft of the sweet incense of the summer morning was lost on the boy of fifteen who, with a thick book of manuscript in his hand, stopped under a pink hawthorn to listen and to drink in the beauty around him.

The path skirted the lawn, over which no feet but those of Dons and Fellows were allowed to tread, and, ignorant of the prohibition, a lady was seen crossing it with light, swift footsteps.

'No one, madam, is allowed to walk over the lawn,' the boy said as the lady reached him. 'You will pardon me for telling you.'

'Indeed, I am glad you did tell me. I sinned in ignorance. I am a stranger in Cambridge.

I came here last night with some friends, chiefly to hear an oratorio written by a Norwich boy, which is to be performed in Trinity Hall to-day.'

'I am William Crotch,' the boy said, 'and I was looking over the score when you came up to me.'

'William Crotch! Ah! I see now. I heard you play when a baby sitting before the organ on your mother's knee.

William Crotch laughed.

'They made too much of me. My mother was too proud of me.'

'Will she be here to-day?'

'No, madam, she is too feeble now for so long a journey, I grieve to say.'

'She must be proud of you still. How old are you now?'

'Fifteen. I came to study at Cambridge when I was eleven.'

'And you love music more and more?'

'It is my life, madam,' the boy said earnestly.

He was tall and slender, but the prophecies of those who foretold that he would never live

to grow up, or that if he did his musical powers would dwindle instead of growing, and that the baby fingers which beat down the keys of his father's organ would only, if he lived, perform ordinary music like a hundred other ordinary musicians, were disappointed.

William Crotch's genius had gone on developing in a most extraordinary way, and now at fifteen an oratorio of his own composition was to be performed in the Hall of Trinity, and was exciting a flutter amongst the musical celebrities of the University. It was a juvenile achievement, and had doubtless many weak places in it, but it was full of real feeling, and had been received at the rehearsal on the previous day with applause.

The boy was remarkable for purity of life and deep religious impressions. There was at this time an idea that he should go to Oxford and read for Holy Orders. Mr Schomberg, a fellow of Magdalen, had heard him play some sacred music and extemporise when on a visit to Cambridge, and, having had a conversation with him, had offered to free all his expenses at

the sister University if he desired to enter the Church. As it turned out, the ruling passion was too strong, and William Crotch decided, on the breaking down of his patron's health, to make music his profession, and to follow it with unswerving loyalty.

Hyacinth now turned to a gentleman who was coming quickly along the gravel path, and said,—

'Here is our young Norwich genius, William Crotch.'

'I am proud to shake you by the hand,' Mr Harvey said; 'you and Crome together do us Norwich folk honour. We have come to Cambridge mainly with the view of hearing you play.'

'You are very good, sir,' the boy said, with a graceful bow. 'I have to look over my score, therefore I beg you to excuse me,' and then, with another bow to Hyacinth, he strolled away.

'Dear! dear! what a child he looks still, and how good his manners are! A contrast to my rough diamond, Crome, eh? But he has lived in a

garret and has never had the chance of being rubbed into shape. Well, my dear,' Mr Harvey said, 'you look the better already for this change—almost rosy, I declare. My poor wife is knocked up with the journey, through I am sure the carriage was as easy as could be. Have you seen George this morning?'

'No,' Hyacinth said.

'Well, it's time for breakfast. "The Hoop" is a moderately good inn, but it's a pity to turn away from all this into a street. What a pleasant life these old Fellows must have in their handsome houses. They feather their nests well. George is all agog to show us Cambridge, so I hope you are ready for sight-seeing.'

'Indeed, sir, I am enchanted with what I have already seen of the place. How can I thank you enough for giving me this treat?'

'By getting strong and well for one thing, and —well, I hardly like to say what the other is. My wife and I are rather set on your giving George a little encouragement; in short we should rejoice to have you, my dear, as a niece—more, as a daughter.'

'You are very good to me, sir,' Hyacinth said. 'I would fain do as you so kindly desire if it were possible, but I cannot be more than a friend to Mr George Harvey. I owe him so much, for his friendship has been a great help to me, and—'

'And why not marry him? We have no children; he is as a son to us, and as such I shall provide for him. My dear, surely you are not clinging to any hope that young Sandford will ever return? Excuse me, my dear, excuse me, but I confess I think this is sentiment—mere sentiment. Don't be angry with me.'

'No, my kind friend, I am not angry. I hear the same thing said too often by Miss Bosanquet and other people; but they do not understand.'

'No, no, and I don't understand. Heaps of good women marry again when left widows; and here are you, a charming young woman, wearing the willow for a poor boy who is lying at the bottom of the sea.'

'No one *knows* that it is so,' Hyacinth said. 'If we did know it might be different, but no one knows.'

'Well, well, I am not one to hurt you by press-

ing this upon you. Only bear in mind it would make me happy to see you George's wife. Ah! here he comes.'

Trinity Hall was crowded with an enthusiastic audience. Stories of Crotch's wonderful infancy and childhood were circulated, and that a boy of fifteen should have produced an oratorio was in itself enough to attract all lovers of music to listen to it and to criticise. But though they might criticise and find faults in the composition, the youth and modest bearing of the author, when he came forward to acknowledge the burst of applause which greeted him, won all hearts.

Many future triumphs were in store for William Crotch—for he became Professor of Music in the University of Oxford at the age of twenty-two, and his noble church music, which still lives, made him famous—but perhaps none were sweeter than the success of this first performance of 'The Captivity of Judah' in the Hall of Trinity College on that bright day of early summer a hundred years ago.

Another week passed, and then the return

journey to Norwich was accomplished. A halt was made for the night at Ely, and in the garden round the noble Cathedral, George Harvey once more pressed his suit.

This time he had more hope, for Hyacinth said,—

'I will think over it, sir, if you will kindly wait for a final answer.'

'Wait!' he said. 'I can well afford to wait if, at the end of the waiting time, there is a glimmer of hope for me. Is there this hope?'

'I am in a great strait,' Hyacinth said. 'It would be unfair to you, sir, if I gave you but a half-hearted affection in return for yours, which I well believe is sincere and true.'

'I am glad you can say you feel that to be the case, and in this I will rest and await your pleasure.'

Throughout the journey homewards in Mr Harvey's luxurious carriage, which rolled easily along through the open stretches of the east country, Hyacinth pondered over her position and questioned her own heart.

All connected with Philip Sandford was shrouded

in mystery, all was uncertainty and doubt as to his fate, while here was an honourable and good man, with whom she had much sympathy of thought and feeling, offering her a love which had already stood the test of several years and had gathered strength with time. Then, what a help he had been to her, and how he had awakened in her the longing for something beyond any happiness earth could bring. How, by his words, he had helped her to forget herself and minister to her sick and poor neighbours, showing her that by this all men should know that she had given in her allegiance to God, even by the love she bore for the humblest and meanest of His children.

All this had been a new life to Hyacinth, and often she had to confess to herself that she was a happier woman now than in earlier days, when she had found no staff to lean on in the time of her sore trouble.

'If I could only forget!' she said to herself. 'If I could only forget!'

She stayed that night at Catton, and in the sunset glory of a radiant summer evening she

turned into Castle Meadow with George Harvey. As he left her at her own door there was something in her good-bye which kindled his slumbering hope into a bright flame.

'Remember,' he said, 'I will wait; but do not keep me too long in suspense.'

'No,' she said, 'it shall not be long,' with a smile which sent him on his way rejoicing.

When Bridget opened the door, Hyacinth saw at once that something had happened.

'Is Sumpter ill?' she asked.

Bridget shook her head.

'No; it's naught to do with Sumpter,' she said. 'But, my dear, my dear, there's news at last.'

'What news?' she asked. 'Bad news, is it?'

'There! there! go into the parlour and you'll see for yourself.'

'Philip!' she exclaimed, as a man rose from the couch by the grate, where Bridget had placed a large bean-pot of laburnums and lilacs.

No, it could not be Philip!

'It's no marvel you do not know me, Hyacinth.'

The voice was enough, and in another moment

she was clinging to the forlorn and worn-looking man, who was indeed her Philip.

'Can you love me still?' he asked. 'I saw you from the window bidding good-bye to one who—'

'Yes; you saw me taking leave of a good and kind friend.'

'He is not your suitor—your accepted suitor?'

'No,' Hyacinth said honestly. 'But oh, Philip! Philip! what has happened to you all these years —these long, long years?'

'Through which you have been faithful to me?' he asked.

'Yes. Did I not promise? How can you think I should break my promise?'

Her heart told her that only an hour ago she was very near yielding to George Harvey's entreaty, and in reply to him had said she would not keep him waiting long, with a smile that had sent him on his way full of hope.'

'What has happened?' she asked. 'What can have happened?'

'It is a long story of disaster and misfortune. The ship in which I sailed full of hope was wrecked midway in a fearful storm in the

Atlantic. All on board perished but myself and another man. We drifted about for days and nights on a raft, and were picked up half-dead by a Spanish ship bound for South America.

'My companion died before we landed, and I found myself alone and without a farthing in the world. I roamed about half-starved, and at last was taken from the streets to a hospital, where I lay for many months between life and death. Exposure and starvation had done their work, and a large abscess on my right arm necessitated amputation. You have not noticed my empty sleeve, Hyacinth?'

No; she had not noticed it, for she was engrossed with trying to find in the worn, haggard face before her some trace of the old likeness of Philip Sandford.

'Your arm! your right arm!' she exclaimed.

'Yes, my right arm. And oh! Hyacinth, I think I had better have died than come home to you like this.'

'How can you say so? Have I not hands enough for both, and there will never be any need for you to work—never. That old man

who has wrought all our woe and misery died a year ago, with no will, and you are the heir of all he possessed.'

'Ah!' Philip said, 'is it really so? How marvellous it all seems!'

'You never wrote one word all these years.'

'I was surrounded by foreigners who could not write at my dictation—I can scarce make legible letters now with my left hand—and I suppose a man who promised to bring news of me to England failed to do so. I made every effort to get a passage home, but I could not work, and I picked up a scanty living by singing in places of refreshment where colonists resorted. It was from one of these that I at last got a passage to England. And how I wished and longed for my violin! I shall never touch a violin again. I have been to good old Parker at the Bank House, and he has offered to take me in till—'

'Till we are married,' Hyacinth said.

'Will you, can you really take a broken-down, lamed man like me?'

'I think I can,' Hyacinth said brightly.

'And now Bridget shall get us a nice supper, and afterwards you can tell me everything—and I will tell you—all that has happened since—since we parted, so long, so long ago. I must be changed as well as you, Philip.'

'You are changed, but you are more beautiful than ever.'

'What! with these grey hairs! See!' she said, tossing off her bonnet. 'Well I know sadness and anxiety and suspense have drawn lines on my face.'

'They are sacred to me, sacred signs of all you have borne for my sake. I do not believe there is another woman in the world who would have held fast to a lover who for five years had made no sign of being alive. God grant I may be worthy of you. You have had many suitors, Hyacinth? I cannot doubt it.'

A bright colour rose to her face as she said,—

'No, not many, I have had one—'

'The man who parted from you at the gate —he was a parson, I think?'

'Yes, and one of the best men who ever lived.'

'And I have come to keep you from marrying him. How he will hate me.'

'If I know him, he cannot hate you, or anyone. Now, Philip, let us bury the sad past, and ask God to help us to begin a new life, and serve Him.'

'Ah! you must teach me to do that, Hyacinth. I fear I shall be a dull learner.'

'I am thinking, dear,' she said, 'that that old man's money shall be used for Him. You will be able to do so much for the sick, and the sad, and the miserable. You can help young men who are friendless—as you once were—and give those who want it education, so that they can earn their livelihood. It consoles me to think that, after all, your uncle's wealth will be in good hands—your hands.'

'Why do you say *my* hands? It will be *yours*. And that is the best part of the business to me.'

She bent over him, and stroked back his hair from his forehead, kissing him as a mother would have kissed a lost son who had come home. For in the heart of a noble woman like Hyacinth Woodrow there is always some-

thing of the maternal element, when the man she loves, whether it be husband or lover or brother, is in need of divine pity and sympathy. Both are called forth in all their fulness by adversity, which, in prosperity, might have lain in hidden and unsuspected depths.

But notwithstanding all her real joy that Philip had come back, she sat up late that night with a pen in her hand and a sheet of paper before her, unable to write on it the words which must be written and ought not to be delayed.

'Castle Meadow' stood at the top of the page of Bath post, and again and again the attempt to write failed. At last, in the formal fashion of the day, she began her letter,—

'DEAR SIR,—I lose no time in telling you Mr Philip Sandford is come home—broken in health, and after much suffering of mind and body.—Yours with grateful regard,

'HYACINTH WOODROW.'

After much deliberation, and many erasures, this postscript was added,—

'*P.S.*—I am so grieved if, by writing this, I give you pain. H. W.'

The reply was characteristic, but no earthly eye saw with what a struggle it was written, nor how deeply the iron entered into the soul of this brave, good man,—

'DEAR MADAM,—I thank you for your letter, and, though the information you are so good as to give me puts an end to my cherished hopes, I can yet rejoice for the wanderer's return, and for you.

'For myself, I bow to God's holy will, and I beg to remain, your obedient servant and friend, GEORGE HARVEY.'

Before many weeks had passed, Hyacinth and Philip Sandford were married.

As soon as the necessary business connected with the position of the heir-at-law was got through, Hyacinth bade farewell to her home on Castle Meadow, and settled in a place near London, where she was her husband's right

hand, literally as well as figuratively, and where she led a life of usefulness, dispensing the wealth which had unexpectedly come to Philip for the welfare of those around her.

Her faithful servants were too old and too much wedded to Norwich to leave it; but they were well provided for, and established in a pretty cottage at Thorpe with Howson, whom Hyacinth had never lost sight of, and whom she now invited to share the Sumpters' cottage.

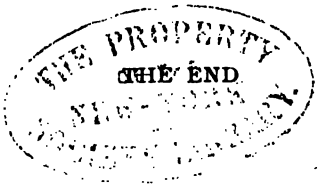
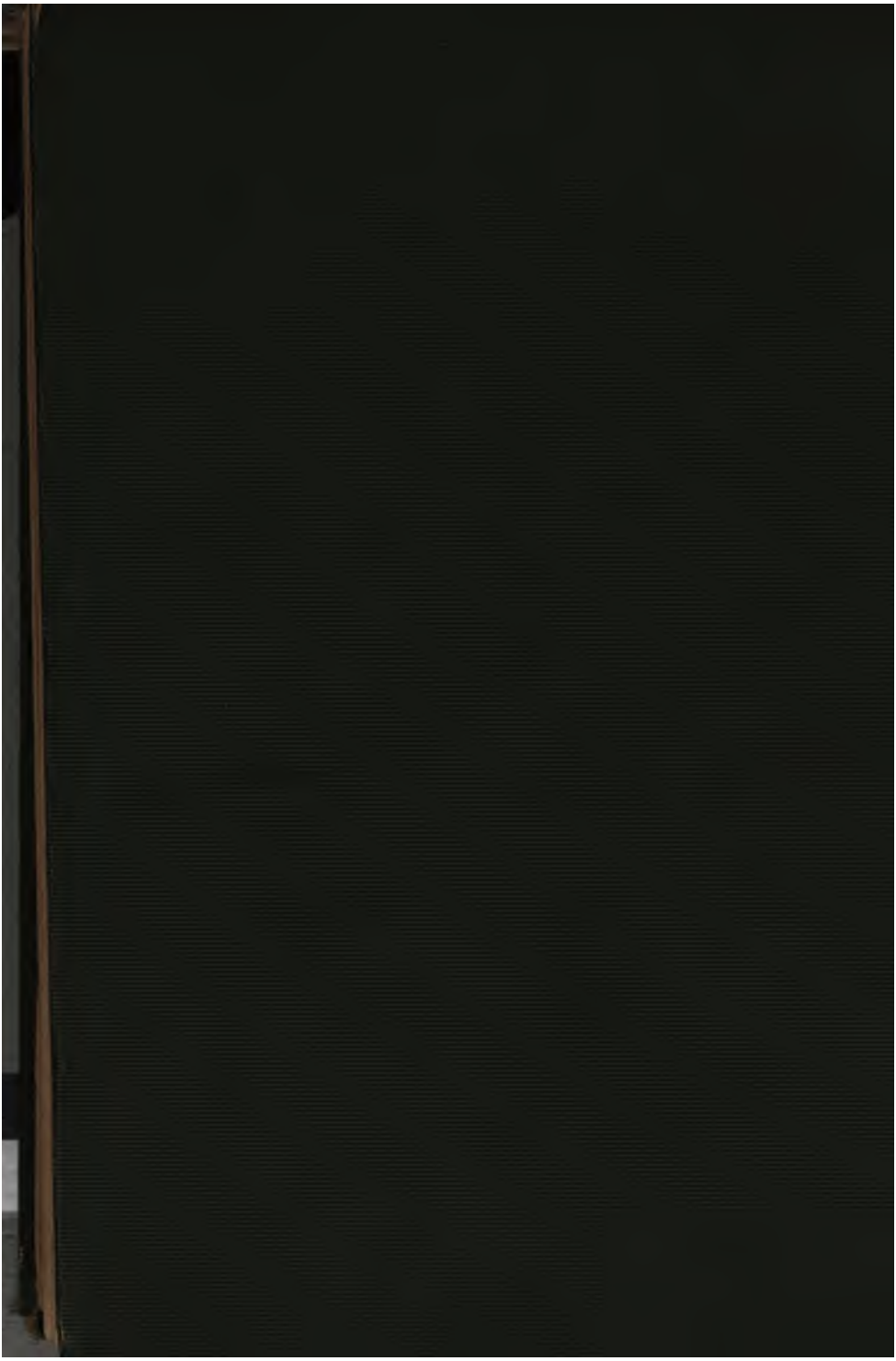
Howson was faithful to the memory of little Bell. A lock of her golden hair was cherished as a priceless jewel, and was often taken from the workbox, where it lay in folds of paper, and stroked and admired as it shone in the light. But it was never displayed to Bridget Sumpter.

The sweet influence of the child was still shed over her old friend, and she would sit and meditate over that narrow way to the Golden City, of which Bell used to read to her by the fire in the cosy kitchen in Mrs Lulham's house. Nor did Miss Bosanquet forget her, and, unable by increasing infirmity to get to Norwich, she

sent Howson tokens of remembrance from time to time, and they were always accompanied with the words, 'In memory of our dear little Bell.'

Poor Howson could not read the words, but she knew they were a sign that Bell was not forgotten by the lady at Sheringham—and she was content.

THE END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